



VINIANA

*Of this book one hundred
copies have been printed
on hand-made paper in
medium octavo, signed
by the author and with the
frontispiece hand-coloured*



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A WINE AUCTION (ABOUT 1820)

From a colour print after Henry Alken

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VINIANA

by

CHARLES WALTER BERRY

with an

introduction by

H. WARNER ALLEN

and eight

illustrations in

collotype

LONDON
CONSTABLE & CO LTD

1929

663.2
B45

PUBLISHED BY
Constable & Company Limited
London W.C. 2

BOMBAY
CALCUTTA MADRAS
LEIPZIG

Oxford University
Press

TORONTO
The Macmillan Company
of Canada, Limited

FROM THE LIBRARY OF
WINE INSTITUTE
85 SECOND STREET
SAN FRANCISCO

156

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THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, GLASGOW.

WINE INSTITUTE
85 SECOND STREET
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF

*A blend of good wines and good stories
as told at table by a Wine Merchant*

DEDICATED
TO
ALL THOSE WHO ENJOY
A GLASS OF
GOOD WINE

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN the master calls upon the pupil for an introduction, what can the pupil do except to obey in a condition of flattered nervousness? There is no other excuse for this preface to a book which needs no introduction. There are not a great many men to be found who know as much about wine, its subtle beauties and its delicate delights, as C. W. Berry; and all his knowledge, appreciation and generosity are at the disposal of his friends. There is a free masonry among wine-lovers. In that goodly fellowship the man who by some divine chance has unearthed a rare and precious bottle is at once preoccupied with an anxious thought: he feels that he owes it to a noble wine to share it with some other wine-lover worthy to enjoy its quality and able to discuss its peculiar merits. Selfishness is a vice unknown to the wine-lover, but there are few worshippers of Bacchus so desperate in their generosity as the author of *Viniana*. He lives in an age when the greatest wines of which we have record are fast vanishing. Those wonderful vintages from 1864 to 1878 with which Nature tried to console mankind for the coming

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of the scourge of *Phylloxera*, the Lafite of 1864, the Margaux of 1871, the Latour of 1875,—they are indeed the swan-song of Bordeaux,—have in our days become as precious as that virtuous woman, who the Preacher tells us is above rubies. The rare perfection of these wines born from the old French stocks which the disease that came from the land of Prohibition destroyed, and their unique artistic beauty can never be reckoned in terms of money. In their case Omar might be certain that the vintner could buy nothing half so precious as the goods he sold. Yet such is the generous goodfellowship born of a love of wine that no sooner has Berry with the aid of sleuths—it may be with the aid of bribery and corruption—conveyed into his possession some masterpiece of *Médoc* than he calls together his friends and shares with them the exquisite pleasure that the artistic appreciation of the noblest wine provides.

The Greek poet has written of the joy of putting the sun to rest with pleasant conversation to which *Dionysus* has given inspiration. In his book Berry has set down some of those illuminated discussions which adorned his *Dionysiac Agapai*. Their reproduction suffers a little from

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the author's incurable modesty. Only the acute judge of character will realise that the host who lavishes on his friends the rarest of wines is at heart a brave adventurer, who would have been in his element in the days when the sea captains of Elizabeth rolled back the frontiers of the world. He has sought death in the air with a perseverance that has often dismayed his friends, and returns smiling to talk of vintages and grapes, from forlorn hopes and hairsbreadth escapes. Even the vintages of Jerez could not dissuade him from challenging fate in an ancient aeroplane tied together with string in a wild attempt to see what kind of war Abdul Krim was waging in the Riff. An hour spent in a storm in the middle of the North Sea, with a ruined balloon half submerged by heavy seas, failed to damp his ardour for free ballooning. It was enough for him that by a miracle—contrived doubtless by the God of Wine—a trawler suddenly appeared and saved him, contrary to all human expectation, for further brave adventures.

The true wine-lover never forgets that a noble wine is a living organism which defies the analysis of science. A chemist may analyse samples of the wine of some renowned Médoc

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château grown in a famous year and of some ordinary Bordeaux wine, and all his inquiries cannot explain the gulf that is set between them. He cannot capture the tenuous ethers and esters which give a great wine its charm, and all that he can do is to suggest some small distinction between the rare and the ordinary wines in their content of *matière sèche*. Nature holds her secrets tenaciously, and it would seem that she has found in the mystery of wine one of her last refuges from the inquiring scientist. Pasteur, in the 'sixties of the last century, discovered that fermentation was the work of microbes, or ferments which he called *saccharomyces*. For the first time the wine-growers understood the process which so miraculously converted the juice of the grape into wine, and this knowledge, it was supposed, would enable him to produce wines of such excellence as the world had never seen. Fate in its irony sent the plague of *Phylloxera* on the best vineyards of the world before any practical deductions could be drawn from Pasteur's discovery. The great vintages between 1864 and 1878 owed nothing to science, and this generation at least will never see their like again. *Phylloxera* compelled the growers to graft the French vines on the American stocks which are

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immune from the disease, and the grapes that are nourished by the sap drawn up through the coarser vine lose something of their quality and of their capacity for age even in a favourable year. Good wines are made from these grapes, but the magic touch is lacking. 1899 and 1900 clarets are noble specimens of their kind, but there is little hope that they will be as nobly dignified and as tenacious of their subtle qualities as, say, the Lafite of 1864 to-day when they have reached its age.

Readers of Mr. Berry's book will learn from it much wine wisdom expressed in that happy style which makes the bottles circulate so merrily at his symposia. He himself tells us that "good wine needs no bush," and thereby makes this introduction otiose and impertinent. I can only apologise to the reader for having obeyed, against my better judgment, the request of a Prince of wine-lovers and good fellows.

H. WARNER ALLEN.

THE CLARET DINNER

MENU OF THE CLARET DINNER

Sherry (50 years in bottle.)

Potage Poireaux.
Suprême de Sole Normand.

1871 Ch. Haut Brion.

1875 Ch. Margaux.

1865 Ch. Lafite.

1870 Ch. Latour.

1869 Ch. Mouton Rothschild
(Magnum).

Noisette d'Agneau Judic.

Dindonneau à la Broche
Pommes Nana.

Madeira, Bual 1816.

Soufflé au Parmesan.
Fruits.

1848 Bas-Armagnac.

CHAPTER I

"Take this, he said, and held aloft
A vine stock branching fair.
Heaven's noblest gift to human kind
Entrusted to thy care.
Go plant it on the sunny hills,
For health and length of days,
And press its fruits for joyous drinks
And the Creator's praise."

Noah to his sons (on deathbed)

GENTLEMEN, well met !
I am delighted to see you here this evening, especially as I have taken great pains to produce a few bottles of exceedingly fine and rare wines for the first of these dinners, which I propose to call our Claret Dinner.

You will observe that I have, so far as possible, dispensed with unnecessary table decorations, bearing in mind that we shall require considerable accommodation for the comfortable arrangement of the glasses for the various wines as they arrive to be dealt with. Further remember, that the fewer number of outside influences which might in any way interfere with our train of thought, the better.

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I would also venture to add, remembering the sentiment so recently expressed by my friend on my left, that you keep your minds away from the pictures of lovely ladies on the walls, and CONCENTRATE ON WINE.

By way of introduction I am offering to you this evening a glass of old Sherry. I always find this preliminary a little perplexing—a somewhat difficult and delicate proceeding. This evening we have contented ourselves with a glass of Sherry. Did I say “a glass”? Perhaps without looking at anyone in particular, I might have said “some glasses”

“And an excellent wine it was too, with such a fine, soft, nutty flavour.”

Yes, you are right. Age will tell, especially when given fine quality to start with. It might interest you to know that this particular Sherry came out of a private cellar, where it had been reposing quietly for upwards of fifty years. I have no doubt that it was a fine old wine when binned away. It is a pity that so excellent a custom is not indulged in in these days, for I do not think that any wine improves to a greater extent by long sojourn in bottle than Sherry, provided always that it is of good quality to start with.

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“I suppose you often come across such wines in an old cellar—remnants of the past?”

They are becoming scarcer and scarcer every day. I remember some years ago going through a private cellar containing very large quantities of old bottled wines, Sherries and Madeiras in particular, which, on a basis of the average of the owner's consumption spread over the previous ten years, would have lasted him four or five hundred years—and I assure you that the consumption in his house was not a negligible quantity.

“Surely it would have all been bad before then? I suppose that there must be a limit to the keeping, let alone the improving of wine?”

That is so, and it is also well to remember that the life of a wine is oft-times, if not always, the life of the cork; if the cork goes, the wine goes, and there's an end to it.

Sherry is indeed a unique wine. It is the only wine which can be used at practically any time, even when smoking. In the morning a glass of Medium Dry Sherry of good quality (which is most important) with a biscuit, is excellent.

The use and the abuse of the pernicious cocktail was undoubtedly one of the strongest factors which brought about Prohibition. Had

our cousins across the Atlantic been content with one glass of good quality Sherry before their meals, all would have been well.

A comforting glass of good wine to a tired man is reasonable; but can anything be more atrocious than drinking for the sake of drinking, than pouring down glass after glass of a concoction of immature spirit and bad wine into an empty receptacle?—It is enough to make the divine Bacchus weep hot tears.

But, look here, we have serious work to consider this evening with our Red Bordeaux, so we will leave the delectable Sherry to take care of itself.

You all know and enjoy a bottle of good Claret—Please take another look at the names of the wines on the menu. Before we commence, we must consider the order in which we shall serve them. I have ventured to place them in the order I would suggest, but I am quite agreeable to vary it, if it is thought fit.

“May I ask what influenced your decision in placing, for instance, 1871 before the 1875 and then the 1870?”

Ah! The reason for commencing with the 1871 is that the 1871 is so light and so elegant, that the more robust wines to follow might tend

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to smother somewhat its delicate and delightful bouquet.

William, serve the 1871 Haut Brion. You can then continue with the 1875 Ch. Margaux. This will enable us to make comparisons at once. Good! Ideal temperature—what the French so adequately describe as *chambré*!

“I think that I prefer the ’71. It is delightful! How the flavour clings to the palate!”

Yes, but it lacks a little the vigour, the nerve of the ’75. The difference in style is due undoubtedly to the district in which the wines are grown, the Haut Brion, as you know, being the highest class Graves (Pessac), whereas the Ch. Margaux is from the very heart of the Médoc proper.

“There is certainly a distinct taste to the Ch. Margaux. I am at a loss to know how to describe it adequately.”

I understand what you mean. I always refer to it as of a cedary flavour, and I am content to leave it at that until I can think of or hear of a better term.

Now shall we have the 1865? The 1865 Ch. Lafite, please, William WONDERFUL!

“Yes, it is certainly wonderful, and what preservation!”

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"It beats me altogether. 1865 is it? Think! it has been the best part of seventy years in bottle."

"Incredible!"

"But how soft and what a farewell."

"Yes, and as you remarked, how marvellously preserved!"

Go on, go on! I delight to hear your comments; they make me feel a queer inexplicable pride.

"Have you much of it?"

What! pride?

"No—of the 1865! The pride you can keep, but the 1865 I would like to share with you."

Well, you shall enjoy one or two more bottles with me, although I don't believe you deserve them.

"No offence about the pride—perhaps you would like to add that the influence of wine is to forgive."

Certainly Now let us have the 1870 Ch. Latour What do you think of it, over there; you?

"Jolly good! But I would give the preference to the 1865."

"So would I."

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"I think it will keep longer, per—haps."

I don't know. It is so difficult to tell. But I don't think it is likely to be given much of a chance. Now, go back to the others.

"I find the 1871 a little weak, eh?"

Comparisons always were, you know——

"Now I understand why we commenced with this one."

"It's dashed good all the same."

Now then—William! William!

"Yes, Sir."

The magnum of Mouton Rothschild 1869 . . .
Are you all served?

"Yes, thanks."

Now, consider this very carefully, and bring as much intellect to bear upon it as possible. I wish our old friend over there would not chatter so much; we must approach this in the proper spirit—almost in silence.

· · · · ·
"——dear! dear! dear!"

Yes, I quite agree with you. Your expressions put me in mind of that quaint old picture by Daumier—two old Parisian gourmets discussing a few bottles of wine—

"*Eh bien malin! Comment le trouvez vous celui-la!*
—*Oui Oui.*"

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“*Mais enfin—Oui . . . Oui . . . Oui.*”

“*Et moi, aussi. Oui.*”

It is certainly a wine to remember; let me repeat it—eighteen hundred and sixty-nine, *soixanteneuf*—Château Mouton Rothschild—bottled velvet.

Now the band begins to play—there’s music in every drop.

“Those Rothschilds know how to get hold of the right things, don’t they?”

They do indeed. They also own the Ch. Lafite, but the 1865 was, I think, a little before them. They started in 1868 or 1869, if I remember rightly; and both are excellent vintages, always giving preference to the ’69—the 1868 has not kept so well, and is a trifle hard in the finish. I believe that the price paid for the vineyard and Château of Mouton was a sum approaching £200,000.

The output is about an average of eight hundred hogsheads, something like forty thousand gallons. I rather fancy that the largest quantity in any one vintage was in the year 1893, when about a thousand hogsheads were made—not very much for an article sought for all the world over.

By the way, did you ever have the good



Le bien malin ! comment le trouvez vous cela là — Oui
vais entrer — Oui oui oui !

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fortune to taste the 1895 Ch. Lafite? That is a wine, my word! We must . . . no, we must not; we must leave it for another occasion; and I can assure you that it will be a treat to which to look forward.

The 1895 which I have was bottled in Bordeaux. There was no bottling at the Château of that vintage; in fact, Château bottling was discontinued at the Château for twenty years, between 1885 and 1906.

Did you ask why?

Presumably owing to the disease—the phylloxera; and the wines not being good, the proprietors wisely decided not to bottle the wine under the Château *cachet*. Even now, should the wine in a given vintage be unsuccessful, it is simply sold as “Vin Rouge,” without the right to use the name of the Château.

“Quite right too.”

I agree with you, and it is a pity that it is not more generally done.

Speaking of Château Lafite, I will tell you an interesting thing which tends to show how thorough MM. de Rothschilds are. They have established an elementary school at the village of Mousset, where the children of the employees at the Château Lafite and at

the Château Mouton Rothschild, as well as those from the neighbouring villages, receive free instruction, especially in the matter of viticulture. "Very far seeing, eh?"

Rather! And what a fine setting and atmosphere for such an institution, right in the centre of the Médoc, tucked in between St. Estèphe and St. Julien!

Have I ever been there? Yes, scores of times; and I am sure that if you like to join me on the next occasion you will be very welcome; they are always only too anxious to extend a welcome to wine lovers.

You must, however, choose the time of the year carefully. Vendange time is the best from your point of view—although not perhaps from the point of view of the proprietor, who is very busy then, as you may imagine.

I would not advise the time of the year when the vines are flowering, as it is almost impossible to taste the wines in the chais at that period, especially those in the casks; the flowering has the effect of making the wines appear "sick." Nature is indeed strange.

"Does it affect the wines in bottle?"

I really do not know. However, I have heard some people claim that it does.

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"I suppose that you have been in the Médoc at vintage time?"

Certainly, numbers of times; and in the old days when, instead of the modern machinery, the pressing of the grapes was done by treading with the bare feet, I have often assisted, taking my place with the men and women, treading away to the rhythm of the local violinist.

Now, let us hark back to these excellent Clarets which we have been enjoying. Have you ever tasted better—or shall we say a better selection?

"Well, we cannot say that we have; have you?"

Yes and No. Certainly never a better selection; but I have a recollection of a Magnum of 1864 Château Lafite. Oh! it was gorgeous. Warner Allen describes it beautifully in his classic, *The Wines of France*. He says that "it was like passing from fine prose to the inspiration of poetry."

I would like you to believe that he in no wise exaggerates the truth. I remember the old Maître de Chais (Pierre Mortier) impressing upon me that it was the finest Lafite ever made. But, unfortunately, *celui-la n'existe plus*. Certainly not in Magnums, though I have a few bottles yet.

"You spoke of a Magnum of Claret; can you tell me what a Tappit-Hen is?"

Well, I think that it simply means a large bottle. Not a definite size such as is generally accepted in the case of a Magnum—two bottles; a double Magnum—four bottles; a Jeroboam—six bottles; and a Rheoboam—eight bottles. A Tappit-Hen I do not imagine is any particular size. I remember reading in a book on wine, which I have in the next room, some reference about this curious named vessel; it traced the origin of the word, which was used by Scott and others, to denote a large bottle containing about one gallon. It was supposed to have reference to the small barrel, which the *vivandières* attached to every regiment in France carry on their back containing wine or spirit and called by them and the soldiers a *cup-petin*.

"Very interesting; I have often wondered where the name came from."

"Don't you consider that these large bottles are a great mistake?"

Not from the point of view of having better wine, but certainly I do when you think of the risk of breakage or of a corked bottle. Some time ago I had some friends to crack a Reho-

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boam with me; I was quite agitated for days before, wondering if it would be corked. What a relief when it proved all right—1896 Château Lafite, and v-e-r-y good indeed, but not in the same class as these wines which we are enjoying this evening.

“Do you often have a corked bottle?”

No, it is quite the exception. But I must tell you of an incident that happened to me at my Club the other night. I called for a bottle of Château Léoville 1911—a good growth of a well-succeeded vintage. It arrived—corked. I complained, but it was so palpable that the waiter immediately said, “I will fetch you another.” The second bottle duly arrived—corked. Should I leave it at that, have some soda water, or should I complain?

Waiter! “Yes, Sir.”

This is also corked.

“I am very sorry, Sir; would you like to see the Secretary? He is in the Club.”

If you wish, but I cannot drink this.

The Secretary duly arrived, and he had to admit the truth of my assertion.

Another bottle—and damne—slightly corked.

This beats everything; there's something rotten in the State of Denmark. I said, Allow

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me to decant the next bottle myself. So out I went in to the Butler's Pantry in order to decant the bottle myself, when immediately the truth, the reason, dawned upon me. What do you think? Right under my nose, the wine waiter emptied out the wine from the decanter and handed the empty decanter to me in which to decant the fourth bottle . . . Our friend there has failed to grasp it. Don't you see that he had used the same decanter each time, so that the first offending bottle had passed on its "offence"?

"What a lesson, eh?"

"What did you do?"

I simply enjoyed bottle Number Four; and, candidly, did not trouble very much about what happened to the wine waiter.

Of course, corked bottles will happen every now and then, but not very often. Nobody has yet found the reason or the remedy. If any of you want to make a fortune, find out, and you will be able to afford to entertain your friends to fine wines for ever after.

"Will the younger wines last out in the same way as these magnificent specimens which we have enjoyed to-night?"

No, I don't think so.

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“Why?”

Why? Because of the conditions which exist. You must remember that after 1878 there was a devastating period of disease in the French vineyards—principally, the *Phylloxera*, which attacked the root of the vine. It was so bad that practically all the vines were uprooted and a stronger American vine was planted, which gave a good yield, but not the finest quality, since which time the French vine has been grafted on to the American stock, which has much improved matters.

Look at 1888! Very good; but as old as, if not older than, the 1865, which you have just tasted. The 1899's and 1900's were and are most excellent. I have recently tasted some beautiful specimens, but I do not think that they can possibly last in the same way. However, fine specimens of St. Emilion and Graves of the vintage 1899 are indeed delectable, OH! how I recollect, in particular, the Château Cheval Blanc, the Château L'Hermitage, both wines of St. Emilion, and the Chevalier (Graves). No artist could go back to the contemplation of his favourite work of art with more zest than I do, to the re-enjoyment of the memory of those beautiful wines. 1914—how good! but past its

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best. Some of the St. Emilions of 1914 were particularly good. Have you ever tried the Château Cheval Blanc of 1914? No?—then you must, when we have a bottle of the 1895 Ch. Lafite.

By the by, have you ever come across Château Ausone, that famous growth of St. Emilion? There's a wine if you like. I believe that there are quite a considerable number of the old vines still remaining in this particular vineyard, and if you see it quoted on a wine list, don't miss it—Ausone, *St. Emilion*. A bottle of 1923 Ch. Ausone, which I drank the other day, was excellent, but so, so old. Indeed, Claret is a very difficult problem.

One of the oldest Clarets I remember to have tasted was at Château Pontet Canet, 1847 vintage; at the Château. It was excellent; wonderfully preserved. It was the first bottle opened, although my host, M. Cruse, assured me that sometimes it was necessary to open several bottles before he obtained one in such a marvellous state of preservation. This was only two or three years ago.

I was telling a friend of mine about this ancient bottle, but I was astonished that he was not astonished.

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"I can easily cap that," he said, and then proceeded to relate how quite recently, on the 9th April last I believe, he had given a dinner party to a dozen friends at his Club with the set purpose of drinking two Imperiales of Claret. He described them as "Imperiales"; though probably they would be known to some as "tappit-hens," because on being decanted they were found to contain equal to between five and six bottles apiece.

The one was Ch. Lafite 1825 and its baby brother Ch. Margaux 1870! My friend described them as being in perfect condition and full of colour; the veteran well holding its own.

I had had it in my mind to offer you this evening a bottle of 1878 Mouton Rothschild. This is a great wine, but I concluded that it would be *de trop*; we must leave it for another occasion. I will tell you a tale about 1878 Mouton. We had a client some years ago who came to the office and asked for a small quantity of the choicest Claret to be sent to his country address. Naturally, having eighteen-seventy-eight Mouton Rothschild in stock, he was advised to have that wine, being assured that he could not possibly do better. He then informed us that his Colonel, a Claret lover, was

coming to stay with him and he wanted to pass a little compliment by offering him the best obtainable. We assured him that he need have no misgivings.

In due time he called again. "Well, Sir," I inquired, "how did the Colonel like his 1878 Mouton?"

He turned quite pale and said, "Don't, don't ask; it was a catastrophe. I had the wine served with some pride, tasted it first, passed it; it was magnificent. The decanter went its round—not a word; the glasses were replenished—still not a word. I could hold my peace no longer. 'Well, Colonel,' I said, as nonchalantly as possible, 'what do you make of the Claret?' He took up the glass containing the precious liquid, smelt the wine, took a sip. 'Yes, yes,' he said, 'very good—*vin ordinaire !!*' "

That reminds me of another incident which I must tell you, with your permission. "Yes, do, do."

It was somewhere in the same neighbourhood, and uncle was coming to visit his nephew who had lately inherited the property. Discussing matters with his good lady, the Squire said, "I cannot find that there is any Claret in the cellar, and I know that Uncle likes nothing better and

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is considered an authority. There is no time to have any sent from London; besides it would require some rest. What shall we do?" "Send down to the local man," she answered; "Uncle will never know but what it is some old wine you have found in the cellar; besides, I believe he is all swank and probably does not know good from bad." True to her suggestion, down he went. "Have you any good Claret in your cellar which you can recommend?" he inquired, adding that it was required for a special occasion. "Nothing to boast about very much," said the merchant, "but what I have you are welcome to. I've a small quantity of an old wine which I believe to be all right. I don't know what it is called, as there are no labels on the bottles. You can have it for three shillings a bottle.'

"Is that the best that you have?"

"It is not the only one that I have, but I think that you will like it best."

"Well, send up half a dozen bottles to the Hall and I'll see if it is approved of."

He told his wife that he had been able to buy a small quantity of good ordinary Claret, and that they must hope for the best.

Uncle duly arrived, also the dinner hour. Claret was served. The old gentleman had

finished his glass, and ventured, "Jolly fine wine this, my boy; did you find it in the cellar? Got much of it?"

"To be quite candid, Uncle, no." Then he told him of his disappointment at not finding any in the cellar, and how, at his wife's suggestion, he had gone down to the local man and bought what he most recommended, and hoped for the best. "I am very glad that you approve of it," he concluded.

"Well, you have nothing to complain about; I hope you were not too extravagant."

Before returning to town, Uncle made it his business to call on this local merchant.

"Good-day to you," he greeted him, "I have come to inquire about the Claret you sold to my nephew at the Hall. What made you send that wine to him? Is that the best you have?"

"Certainly, Sir, I told him that he was not to expect much, but that it was an old wine."

"How much do you ask for it?"

"Only three shillings a bottle, and he can send it back if he does not like it."

"That is not the point. I drank it there and rather liked it, so I thought I would inquire if you had any more and how much."

"There are only between five and six dozens."

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"Well, you can send them to me. There is my address," he added, handing him his card.

"Should you come across any more little lots of old Claret you might let me know."

"That I will," he replied, "but these old wines don't often come my way."

"Where did you come across this one?"

"Well, if you wish to know, Sir, and you won't let it go any further—I bought it off the butler when the old Squire died. He told me that it was the wine supplied for the housekeeper and that she gave it to him. I paid him half-a-crown a bottle for it."

"Well, send me what you have."

It turned out to be 1878 Château Mouton-Rothschild; the corks were branded. I think that Uncle knew something about Claret, don't you?

"Have you ever been fortunate enough to pick up such a bargain as that?"

Have I? Occasionally. I'll tell you of an instance. Curiously enough it was with 1878 Claret. I attended a sale many years ago in the provinces. I had been sent down to bid for some old Port. The first lots in the catalogue were described as old Claret; twenty odd dozens divided into lots of three dozens, if I remember rightly. The wine was handed round on a tray,

with the cork. I was not particularly interested in the Claret, so I declined the little glass of wine, but contented myself by taking the cork, one glance at which was sufficient. I read the inscription thereon.

"What bid for this old Claret, gentlemen? What offers? Shall we say sixty shillings?" The auctioneer received no response, until an old farmer who was standing by me bid fifteen shillings. "Fifteen shillings is all I am bid; is this the best? It's going; it's giving it away." I nodded. "I am bid sixteen shillings," he said. The farmer, "Seventeen shillings, Sir." "Seventeen shillings I am bid," said the auctioneer. Aside to the farmer I muttered, "You are better off with good beer." "I think so," he acquiesced. "Seventeen shillings is all that I am bid for this fine old wine," said Mr. Auctioneer. I nodded. "Eighteen shillings I am bid," he said; "going at eighteen shillings, going, going—gone." "Serve him right," I ventured to the farmer. "I think so," he grumbled.

In the train on the return journey I met an old friend. I made an opportunity to show him the cork. "You have not any of this wine?" he half inquired. "About fifteen dozens or a little more," I answered.

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“Do you want to sell it?”

Well, yes, I said, at a price. What shall we say—100 shillings?

“Done,” he said, and it was. 1878 Ch. Léoville Lascasses, bottled at the Château.

A good day’s work, did you say? Yes, I think so, and an honest penny turned to good account, for I am sure the farmer was better off with his beer.

“Claret is a noble beverage, isn’t it? According to Thackeray, both Fox and Sheridan were very partial to it.”

Yes—Pardon—what were you about to say?

“That I am reminded of a passage from Thackeray. I believe it is something like this (from the ‘Four Georges’)—

‘Pray, Bishop, how much of this Claret have you that you wish to remove?’

‘Oh! about six dozens.’

‘That all! Why then, you had better ask me to dine with you half a dozen times and I will carry it all away myself.’

“Splendid fellow, did you say? I am sorry that I do not agree. Too greedy a fellow.”

“Your reference to Thackeray has put me in mind of a passage from Keats; quite good.”

Go on, we will bear with you.

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“Well, here goes:

‘O! there is nothing like fine weather, and health, and books, and a fine country, and a contented mind, and a diligent habit of reading, and thinking, and an amulet against ennui—and, please heaven, a little Claret cool out of a cellar a mile deep—with a few or a good many ratafia cakes.’ ”

“Bravo! you remembered that very well.”

Stephen Gwynn sent me this which he had found on the door of an estaminet at Lyons:

“Mieux vaut Boire
et s’en ressentir,
Que de ne pas boire
et s’en repentir.”

But in all modesty he thought he could better it by the following:

“Better to drink
and then feel bad,
Than not to drink
and wish you had.”

“I think it is my turn now.”

What, pray, do you remember?

“Why, an old doggerel, ‘Old Tom of Bedlam.’
Here it is:

‘The man in the moon drinks Clarret,
Eates powder’d beef, turnip, and carret,

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But a cup of old Malaga Sack
Will fire the bushe at his back.' ”

.

Dear me; look at the time! We have been so engrossed in the subject of Claret that we have almost forgotten the Madeira. There is always a medley of thoughts at the mention of this wine—and what a wine it can be!

What do you think of it?

“Excellent.”

And you?

“Let me fill my glass again before I express the opinion which I already feel about it. . . . Yes, . . . I am quite right, magnificent.”

What a pity this wine has gone out of fashion. We must pray for another Falstaff to reinstate it. Undoubtedly the *Phylloxera*—that devastating disease of the roots of the vines—oïdium and mildew were mainly responsible, for after the vineyards were entirely destroyed in the early 'seventies, it never regained its former position. Many people declare, and quite rightly too, that they cannot take Port on top of Champagne. Let them try Madeira—Madeira old and good—and they will not regret it.

Do you know that the Island was supposed

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to have been planted with vines from Candia about the year fourteen hundred? And if I can recollect correctly what Henderson wrote about it, in the year 1400 a traveller who visited the Island wrote to his friends that, owing to the mild climate and the volcanic soil, he found that the vines produced more grapes than leaves and that the clusters were of extraordinary size.

"By the way, what is Malmsey?"

Malmsey is simply a corruption of Malvasia, where this particular vine came from: as our friend Henderson has it, "Monemvasia"—a small fortified town in the bay of Epidaurus Limera. I suppose that you were thinking of the Duke of Clarence when you chipped in about Malmsey? "Yes, as a matter of fact, I was."

Do you remember the *Legende de Maître Pierre Faiferi*?

"No, I cannot say that I do. Let us have it."

"I have seen the Duke of Clarence
(So his wayward fate had willed),
By his special order drown'd
In a cask with Malmsey fill'd.
That that death should strike his fancy,
This the reason, I suppose,
He might think that hearty drinking
Would appease his dying throes."

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"Jolly good for you. Let us hope that it did."

Anyone else?

"Yes, I would like to ask you a question."

Well, carry on.

"Who was it that said that Madeira made him feel as light as a grasshopper?"

I'll give it up. Who?

"Why! William Congreve, in the *Old Bachelor*."

I hope that you do not feel any heavier after your glass this evening?

"*Au contraire*, I've never felt more fit. Is there any left in the decanter?"

Pass him the bottle.

"All I can remember reading about Malmsey is that Mary Queen of Scots, during her captivity at Tutbury I think it was, was granted a weekly allowance of Malmsey for her bath. The only other occasion I have ever heard of wine being used in a bath was in connection with a celebrated actress, who is said to have had a bath in Champagne."

Tut! Tut!

"I suppose that the Sack that we read of—the Falstaffian Sack, for instance—was in reality Madeira?"

Well, yes, to a certain extent. But Sack simply means *Sect* or *Sec*, that is, dry. There

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were Madeira Sack, Canary Sack, Sherries Sack, etc. Speaking of Sack, wasn't it Swift who wrote:

"As clever Tom Clinch, while the rabble was bawling,
Rode stately through Holborn to die of his calling.
He stopped at the 'George' for a bottle of Sack
And promised to pay for it when he came back."

Well, I reckon that we had better leave the Sack, or we shall get it. We will have our Armagnac in the other room.

.
Now, are you all quite comfortable?
"Rather."

Some of you may not have tasted Armagnac before. That was the reason why I was induced to introduce it to you this evening. It will probably interest you to hear one or two details about this particular Brandy. The district of Armagnac lies about one hundred miles to the south-west of Bordeaux, Cognac being much about the same distance to the north of Bordeaux. There are several growths; but as a fine Liqueur, there is only one to which you need pay any attention, that is, the Bas-Armagnac, which might be described as the Grande Champagne of the Armagnac. The other growths are somewhat coarse or common.

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There are, however, in the Bas-Armagnac some Brandies which are delicate and refined, but they always possess a *terroir* of their own. These Brandies mature very rapidly, owing, no doubt, to the fact that they are distilled at a strength between 5° to 8° under proof, whereas Cognac Brandies are distilled at between 15° to 20° over proof. During a long trip I made through the district, I gathered that it would be detrimental both to the quality and the bouquet to distil it at a higher strength.

One thing that astonished me was the careless way in which the peasants stored their Brandy. In nine samples out of ten the spirit tasted of the wood. Nevertheless, I did come across one or two small casks of something really fine, such as the eighteen hundred and forty-eight which we are now enjoying, or rather, which I hope you are all enjoying.

"I think that it is most interesting and enjoyable, don't you fellows?"

"That we do, and we are much indebted to our host for giving us the opportunity of making the acquaintance of this, at any rate to me, new friend."

A short time ago I was a prisoner in this room—kept in by reason of a bad cold. To while

away the time, I skipped through various of these volumes on the shelves, making notes of interesting references to wine. I remember a good many. Would you care to hear a few? Those I forget I can easily refer to.

"A very good idea."

"By all means let us have them."

Well, then, did you know that we are indebted to the Arabs for the invention of distillation, about the year 900?

Here is Pepy's *Diary*:

"At night by land, to my father's house,
Where I found my Mother not very well,
I did give her a pint of Sack."

Here we have the *Compleat Angler*:

"I, marry Sir, this glass of good Sack has refreshed me."

The mention of Sack makes me refer to Ben Jonson's *Staple of News*:

"Come hither,
Near me, yet nearer breathe upon me, Wine.
Wine o' my Worship! Sack, Canary Sack!"

And don't forget that Ben Jonson laid the plot of his *Volpone* and wrote most of it after a present of ten dozen of Palm Sack; so he acknowledges:

"*Rabelais*. Argus had a hundred eyes for his sight;
a butler should have (like Briareus) a hundred
hands wherewith to fill us wine indefatigably."

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Here's delightful old Omar. Of course you all know him by heart, but I must read to you this, from one of the Metropolitan Police Courts, dated 3rd March, 1926:

"Give her a bottle of beer, a novel, and a nice fire, and that's all she wants."

The old writers were great believers in the efficacy of wine. Listen to these. Voltaire:

"He" (Candide) said to Pangloss, "O get me a little wine and oil, I am dying."

Here's Cervantes—poor old *Don Quixote* in trouble:

"Washing the wound with a little wine, bound it up as well as she could."

And on the other shelf over there, just refer to *Anthony and Cleopatra*:

"I am dying, Egypt, dying,
Give me some wine, and let me speak a little."

Did I find any references in Byron? Yes, several, but the one which I remember best is where he says:

"I hate the lingering bottle."

"I remember one from Byron. May I give it to you?"

VINIANA

By all means, what is it?

“The evaporation of a joyous day
Is like the last glass of Champagne, without
The foam which made its virgin bumper gay.”

And here is Lord Lytton. Shall I read you a passage from *The Last Days of Pompeii*? It will show you that they knew how to appreciate old wine in those days, at least so His Lordship thought—

“... may this cup be my last, but it is the best wine I have drunk at Pompeii.

‘Bring hither the amphora,’ said Glaucus, ‘and read its date and its character.’

The slave hastened to inform the party that the scroll fastened to the cork betokened its birth from Chios, and its age a ripe fifty years. ‘How deliciously the snow has cooled it,’ said Pausa. ‘It is just enough.’

‘It is like the experience of a man who has cooled his pleasures sufficiently to give them a double zest,’ exclaimed Sallust. ‘It is like a woman’s No,’ added Glaucus, ‘it cools, but to inflame the more.’”

Here is an interesting one from Bede, A.D. 700:

“The island abounds in milk and honey, nor is there any want of vines, fish or fowls.”

So you see we used to have vineyards here.

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Taking up these books in this way, reminds me that it was Gladstone who once acknowledged that if he found himself with an old volume and a bottle of old wine close by, the situation was irresistible.

“And no bad judge.”

“Do you happen to have those lines of—I think it was Sheridan—being a play on your name?”

Why, yes, I have them in this room. Would you like to hear them? I will not keep you a moment; they are in this drawer, I believe. Here they are:

“You’ve made a sad MULL BERRY
By sending your BILL BERRY,
Before it was DUE BERRY.
Your father, the ELDER BERRY,
Wouldn’t have been such a GOOSE BERRY
As to poke *his* BILL BERRY
Before it was DUE BERRY
Like a long-necked CRAN-e BERRY.
But you needn’t look so BLACK BERRY,
I don’t care a STRAW BERRY.
I’ll be out of your g-RASP BERRY
By the season of HOLLY BERRY,
So I bid you ADIEU BERRY.”

“What is that book there, marked *Bottles*?”

Oh! that! It contains a few effusions of my

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own—odes to old bottles. You can look through them if you wish; there are plenty of them.

“Yes. Ah! this is rather amusing—a skit on the ‘Ten Little Nigger Boys.’ ”

I will read it to you, if you like; but I should explain that one of the bottles was so misshapen that it could hardly stand upright; and, also, that the wine contained in these bottles came from the famous estate of the family Cloete of Constantia. Here it is:

Ten little bottle boys
Setting out to dine,
One had a faulty cork,
Then there were nine.

Nine little bottle boys
Looking so sedate,
One had a broken crust,
Then there were eight.

Eight little bottle boys,
Cherubim from Heav’n,
One couldn’t stand upright,
Then there were seven.

Seven little bottle boys
Always in a fix,
A Cloete swallowed one,
Then there were six.



"THE TEN BOTTLE-BOYS"

[1791]

From a photograph

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Six little bottle boys,
Very much alive,
One decanted all alone,
Then there were five.

Five little bottle boys
Out of half a score,
One caught the weevil bad,
Then there were four.

Four little bottle boys
From the cellar free,
One ullaged by himself,
Then there were three.

Three little bottle boys
Wond'ring what to do,
One enticed the butler,
Then there were two.

Two little bottle boys
When the day was done,
One was taken up to bed,
Then there was one.

One little bottle boy
Standing all alone,
Winked at his Master there,
Then there was none.

How do you like this one on a Port Trignum?
I could not locate "E.H." so I had to resort to
a Limerick:

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“‘E.H.’ was a jolly good sort
Who dearly loved his glass of Port,
He’d drink a bottle, then a brace,
Till such was the colour of his face
That his friends declared when his life did wane,
They would pour him back in the bottle again.”

Before you go, and with the hope that none of you will be any the worse from the wines you have seemingly enjoyed, I must read to you this from Tovey’s book:

“... but a friend who had accompanied us was too polite to decline, and imbibed a portion of a glassful, and but for the assistance of a medical man immediately after he left the house, he would probably have died from the effects of the poison. We were asked what we supposed this wine was made from. We pleaded ignorance, but speculated upon mushrooms. The old lady, however, informed us that it was real HOCK, for she had made it from the HOLLY-HOCKS! Our friend’s sufferings induced us subsequently to persuade her to destroy what stock she had remaining, with a promise to make no more.”

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MENU OF THE BURGUNDY DINNER

1904 Chablis Moutonne.	Tortue Claire. Rouget en Papillotte.
1906 Clos du Roi.	Selle d'Agneau Mireille.
1904 Clos du Tart.	Petits Pois Nouveau.
1887 Clos de Vougeot.	
1868 Romanée (Magnum).	Bécasse au fumet. Salade Vigneronne. Canapé Freneuse.
1908 Cockburn.	Dessert.
1815 Waterloo Port.	
Eau de vie de Marc.	

CHAPTER II

“What is this life you are so sure about?
A flame that kindles, flashes, and goes out,
The unchanging heaven and the eternal sea
Serve but to mock our mutability.
And you before this wine who hesitate
For what, I ask you frankly, do you wait?”

IAN COLVIN,
Translation from *Li Tai-po*.

I HAD in my mind to offer you this evening a bottle of good Moselle or of good Hock as an introduction, but after careful consideration I came to the conclusion that the white wine from, more or less, the same district would prove to be the most adaptable.

A good Moselle wine is oft-times a very suitable opening, especially for the sparkling wine of Rheims, with all its invigorating nonchalance, but a trifle too elegant to show the way up the avenue which leads to the glorious and more robust wines of the Bourgogne.

To my way of thinking, the wines of the Moselle and of the Rhine, with their tributaries, should be kept apart and considered separately, in the same manner in which we are dealing

with Bordeaux, Burgundy and Champagne. "Excellent idea, can't you arrange it?—but it must be at my house and at my expense, bear that in mind."

This is kind of you; a suggestion not to be lightly dismissed, but there are difficulties in the way.

What a field day we could have with a selection of the wines of the famous nineteen-twenty-ones, which is considered to be the finest vintage in the history of German viticulture, although by all accounts that of 1857 must have been remarkable. It is also well to remember that this industry dates back to the times of the early Romans. Don't you recollect reading in "Tacitus", where he refers to the Roman soldiers on the borders of the Rhine purchasing wine.

The Palatinate wines I dismissed from my mind for this evening, as I look upon them as far too rich, and as for the Steinwein (in the curious little boxbeutel), I think that you would have found them too hard and unsympathetic. At the same time, do not forget what wonderful keeping powers and properties fine Steinwein possess. Not so very many years ago I opened a bottle of fifteen-forty Steinwein and a bottle of seventeen-thirty-one, which a friend of ours

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had obtained from the so-called mad King Ludwig of Bavaria. They were astonishingly interesting. We drank and enjoyed the 1731, but with the veteran we contented ourselves with sipping, by which means it was easy to realise that it was clamouring to return to mother earth. We have yet a few bottles remaining, but unfortunately "sleight of hand" played his part, and to our chagrin some have been removed elsewhere, or through ignorance lost in oblivion.

I shall always remember the reverence, the awe almost, with which I approached this venerable wine to my lips, and how the peculiarity of its flavour struck a new note on the senses.

These fine German wines remind me of something which I feel sure will interest and amuse you. Will you bear with me?

"Yes, yes."

Some time ago I happened to be dining at home with Friday—you remember, my eldest daughter?—and I inquired of her what she would like to drink for dinner. "I'll leave it to you, partner," she said. I therefore sallied forth and returned from the cellar with a bottle of remarkably fine wine. There, I remarked, is

something choice—you can smell the cork and I will manage the rest!

Eighteen hundred and ninety-three Forster Jesuitengarten Auslese, a very, very choice specimen of a very choice growth of a very choice vintage, and right well did we enjoy this delectable nectar from the Palatinate. It was a rare and very extravagant treat, but the way in which the wine was appreciated caused me to feel that the indulgence was fully justified.

During the course of the meal, Friday rose and quitted the room, to return with a pencil and paper.

“Pass me the bottle, please,” she said, and then proceeded to make a note of the name and vintage.

Why are you doing that! I inquired.

“Well, Daddy,” she naïvely replied, “you know that at times I am taken out to dinner, when invariably one of the first questions asked after we are seated and waiting the attention of the waiter is, ‘What wine would you like to drink, Miss B.’ In future, I shall produce this slip of paper.” Eighteen-ninety-three Forster Jesuitengarten Auslese.”

You’re an optimistic young woman! I said.
 “Daddy,” she remarked, “after drinking such

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beautiful wine as this, I can visualise the great Omar with his book of verse, wondering what you wine merchants could purchase with your profits, one half as precious as the goods you sell."

Splendid, Friday, I said, that is the spirit. Lend me your paper and pencil and I'll write down for you my impression of the Great One seated and in contemplation of beautiful wine. If you will pardon me one moment, I'll fetch it from the desk and inflict it on you. It's simple and amusing; anyhow it pleased the child:

"There passed across his face
A smile benignant;
Nor was it hard to guess
The reason why.
In manner orthodox he sat;
His folded limbs did there
Portray his body's ease.
His mind had wandered far
And fleeting thoughts led him
To acres broad,
Where scent of flowering vine
Recalled him to himself,
And to a goblet, the slender stem
Of which was lightly held
Within his grasp.
He raised it to his lips,

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And summoning to his aid
The slumbering sense of smell
And taste, lovingly
Did look upon the golden vintage
And exclaimed,
'I often wonder what the vintners buy
One half so precious as the goods they sell.' "

But I must not take up your time in this way, for we have serious work to consider this evening in the contemplation of a few of the Grand Crûs of the Bourgogne, and I hope that you will be well pleased with the selection.

You will have noticed that I have purposely omitted to give you a glass of Sherry.

"Yes, I noticed it with sorrow; I had been looking forward to another glass. I have not forgotten, nor am I likely to forget, the nectar which you produced when we were last here."

Never mind, old chap, you shall have a glass on another occasion, or two if you wish. By the way, I believe that you were one of the guilty ones at the last dinner from whom I diverted my glance.

No, no, not a word; you were very welcome.

This evening, as I have already indicated, we have a bottle of Chablis-Moutonne 1904.

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"A beautiful wine, too; not a wine one often comes across, is it?"

No, and sad to say, it is practically a thing of the past. I believe it is now simply a "brand"; the glory of its former beauty will only live in the memories of those who have been privileged to enjoy a bottle, such as we are doing this evening.

"Why is the Chablis one comes across often so poor, or perhaps, I should say, appears so to me?"

Ah! there is Chablis and Chablis, and I fear that the larger proportion of the wine masquerading under the label of "Chablis" has little or nothing to do with that district, but is a cheap, probably coarse wine, which should be known as either White Burgundy or White Beaujolais, districts some eighty to one hundred miles away from Chablis proper.

"How do you account for that distinctive and delicate type of Chablis in comparison to White Burgundy?"

I would suggest that the reason for this is the soil. There is a curious point with reference to the clay soil to be found at Chablis. It sinks very deep, and is not to be found elsewhere until one arrives on the coast of Dorset, where

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the Kimeridge clay—the very foundation of the vineyards of Chablis—is seen to perfection.

“Are there no White Burgundies?”

Rather; and don't you miss the opportunity of getting the other side of them when you have the chance.

As I have told you, my mind was much exercised the other evening when selecting our wines for to-night; but I came to the conclusion that a fine Montrachet or a fine Meursault, which are undoubtedly the finest growths of White Burgundy, would prove too heavy as an introduction to a selection of “The King of Wines”, or “The Wine of Kings,” call it whichever you will. Now, William, we are quite ready for the decanter, which I have marked No. 1, of the Burgundies.

1906 Clos du Roi. I have not much doubt that this wine is Corton, Clos du Roi, although there are several vineyards of the same name. It was Louis XIV who patronised the Wines of Burgundy to a considerable extent, hence the appellation.

William, the No. 2.

1904 Clos du Tart. . . . My word! that's a fine wine; I can smell it as it is being poured out. What aroma.

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"Yes, yes, you are right, that *is* wine. It speaks for itself."

If my friend over there will leave his glass for a minute, his viands will not taste so cold when he attacks his plate!

"Can't help it; I simply must enjoy this wonderful fragrance and put up with the consequences."

I suppose that you think this is the height of perfection?

"I never wish nor expect to surpass it. I am quite satisfied with what I am enjoying."

Yes, it is really fine; and, as a matter of interest, you might like to know that the vineyard of Clos du Tart is not only one of the finest, but it is also one of the most ancient. A religious Order purchased it in the year of grace 1141, and in the year 1184 the then Pope, Pope Lucius III, confirmed them in possession.

But wait! William, the next bottle, No. 3.

This is Clos de Vougeot 1887. . . . The Clos du Tart, which we have as No. 2, is indeed a dream. . . . I agree with our old gourmet at the end of the table, that it is a thousand pities to wake from it.

To me, there is always a fascination—a halo—attaching to Clos de Vougeot. I speak of the wine of the past; to-day it is not the same thing.

VINIANA

The vineyard has been divided into a large number of small holdings; it is an interesting, walled-in vineyard, situated about midway between the famous cities of Beaune and Dijon.

I remember reading in Weld's book that it was the custom of French troops to present arms when passing the Clos de Vougeot. This caught my imagination, which was only enhanced when someone told me that on one occasion the great Emperor took advantage of this opportunity to address his troops thus, pointing to the illustrious Clos:

"To these vines and your mothers we owe such sons of France."

Other great historical wines are Chambertin and Romanée Conti, great favourites with both Louis XIV and the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte.

The little incident about the Emperor and the Clos de Vougeot recalls a few lines of the learned Erasmus. You must excuse the indifferent French, but, as far as I remember, he said something like this:

"Ah! Bourgogne, heureuse mère des hommes, que tes mamelles ont de bon lait."

Let us hark back to glasses numbers one and two, 1906 Clos du Roi and 1904 Clos du Tart.

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I feel sure that it will interest you to know the history of them. They formed a part of a collection of fine wines made by certain bankers in Liège, soon after the outbreak of the Great War. They were presumably held in trust and successfully concealed under an old and disused ice factory from the eyes of the enemy. There were twenty thousand bottles in all of the finest wines. For various reasons, death, and impoverishment in particular, the whole collection was sold *en bloc* after the end of the war. The two first wines which we have enjoyed this evening formed a part of this historical collection.

You probably know that the Belgians, wealthy or otherwise, look upon their fine Burgundies as more precious than gold, yea than fine gold, and they have a reputation for this throughout the whole world.

I must tell you of one unfortunate possessor who did not fare so well. He decided that he would bury his stock in a lake on his estate. He, however, overlooked one very important item—the labels—so that on the arrival of the enemy they found that the surface of the water was more or less covered with floating labels. You may be sure that the Hun did not require to be further enlightened.

VINIANA

What did you say?

"Very amusing, but dashed hard luck on the poor old Belge."

We must now have another look at glass number three.

Yes; the Jubilee Clos de Vougeot holds its own and stands erect. This also was bottled in Belgium.

They are great bottlers of Burgundy, as well as lovers of it, in Belgium, especially in the Walloon country; no house is without its stock, small or large, and probably the first inquiry that a father makes of his prospective son-in-law is, "What Burgundy have you in stock?"

That reminds me of the young Laplander who wishes to choose a wife. His courtship is carried on by a friend—don't smile. This friend has to mediate between him and the young lady's father. The medium employed is Brandy or some such spirit, and the visits of the lover are only permitted in proportion to the number of bottles he sends.

To go back to the bottling of Burgundy in Belgium, it is carried out much after the same manner in which we deal with Vintage Ports in this country. They bottle it very young—no finings—so that all the, what is commercially

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called "guts" are retained, and the end justifies the means.

We are now to have a Magnum of 1868, Romanée. William, the Magnum, please. . . . My word! there's a wine. . . . What did you say? "I was making a suggestion that we might all stand in silence for half a minute, glass in hand, to offer heartfelt thanks to the GIVER of such good things."

An excellent idea, replete with gratitude.

Now that we have made this little gesture, we shall be, or should be, in an excellent frame of mind to compare these wines.

I am glad to notice that you have, all of you I think, left some small quantity of wine in each glass, so that you will be able to make comparisons.

Sorry; I didn't see your glass required attention. William, at the end of the table, glasses number two and three want replenishing. "Thanks ever so much; I hope that I am not depriving any one?"

Which do you prefer?

"Candidly, I give the preference to the 1887 Clos de Vougeot, No. 3 glass."

"I prefer the Clos du Tart."

How about you?

"I find it rather difficult to choose; they are all so very good. Which do you like?"

Well, I must admit that the age and the wonderful state of preservation of the 1868 Romanée fills me with amazement. I am not altogether surprised, and I will tell you why. In the year 1926 I was in Antwerp for the start of the Gordon Bennett International Balloon Race. For reasons which I am not going to worry you with now, I decided not to attend the official banquet given in honour of the aeronauts. My companion, Charles Spencer, was of the same opinion, so we left word at the hotel to this effect, in case any one should be making inquiries for us. We made our way to a certain restaurant, the name of which I forget—it had been recommended as one of the best. The wine list did not offer anything which particularly attracted my attention, so I inquired for the patron. He duly arrived, and I proceeded to explain to him my requirements. "Ah! Monsieur," he said, "I understand. Yes, yes. In my private cave I have a few bottles of old Romanée. I believe it to be *dix-huit cent soixante huit*. It is without question very old and very good—*magnifique!* What do you say to that, Sir?" he asked.

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"*Ça depend*," I said, "on what you are going to charge for it."

"What does that signify to a connoisseur like Monsieur?"

Please don't smile. "Well," I said—overcome, no doubt, by his flattery—"I must have a bottle, but you must not charge me more than a couple of hundred francs for it."

"*Bien entendu*," he replied, and made as if to fetch the illustrious bottle. "One moment," I called, "I would like the bottle to be brought up in its horizontal position, and I should like to be allowed to decant it myself."

He agreed, and the operation caused quite a flutter of interest and amusement among the other diners.

It was a grand bottle, Gentlemen, and I am drinking it over again with you now.

We had all but finished our dinner when a waiter rushed through the restaurant in a wild state of excitement: "*En voilà, huit qui arrivent. En voilà, huit qui arrivent.*"

He proceeded to prepare a table, and, to our astonishment, who should come in but the Commander with seven English friends, including the other English pilots, who had, like ourselves, decided not to attend the official banquet.

They settled down to their dinner, chatting merrily, arguing about the choice of wine, when the wine waiter arrived and, presenting the *carte des vins*, asked, "*Que desirez vous boire, Messieurs?*"

The Commander made some slight pretence at looking at the *carte*, then suddenly, as if inspired, said: "You see that gentleman over there?" pointing to me.

"Yes, Sir."

"Well, we will have eight bottles of the same as he has had."

We left. I hope he footed the bill, but I don't think that he ever quite forgave me for being so extravagant.

Even with this influence it is a little difficult to decide. I am reminded of the words of Ferdinand in his description of Miranda. "Admir'd Miranda", although I would hesitate to acknowledge any defects.

William, I think you might remove these glasses and we will proceed with the Port.

"I would suggest that while William is doing this, you tell us something else about Burgundy, anecdotes or otherwise. I find it so very interesting."

Some people think that Port is the only wine

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that requires careful decanting. This is foolish. Of course, any wine with a deposit should be so treated, and this reminds me of an incident which was related to me only a few days ago.

A gentleman was entertaining at his house his sister-in-law and his niece. Shortly before dinner he said to his niece, "Your Aunt is away, so I am just going to indulge in a bottle of old Chambertin Burgundy. I shall so much enjoy it, for when your aunt is here she won't allow me to have it. I will go down to the cellar and bring it up." "Oh! Uncle Mac, don't you trouble; tell me where to find it and I will fetch it for you. I'd love to."

Uncle explained where the bottle of old wine would be found in the cellar, and down went the young lady.

After a short interval she returned and, holding the bottle aloft, waving it in the air, exclaimed: "Here it is, Uncle Mac; am I not clever to have found it?"

Some Uncles would not have enjoyed the play afterwards, but he assured me that he did.

I was recently told, and although it sounds almost incredible I have no reason to doubt its authenticity, that a would-be diner called at a high-class restaurant in order to arrange

for dinner with a friend on the following evening.

With regard to the wine, he selected an old Burgundy (it might have been Claret, but I think I was told Burgundy), desiring that it should be carefully decanted.

When he arrived with his friend on the following evening, there was the bottle of old wine alright, but in its original bottle.

You can imagine what followed; the proprietor called the head wine-waiter for an explanation, who in his turn referred to a junior, who explained that he had done as he had been instructed: he had decanted the wine—well—then he poured it back into its bottle!!

Now, I will tell you something else quite amusing, but in a different vein, although it demonstrates the value of good Burgundy wine. It is concerning one whom we considered as an old and friendly client, but one who never seemed to realise the necessity of meeting his obligations. He had been owing a fair amount for several years, and in spite of repeated promises had not reduced the sum of his indebtedness. At last the firm threatened him with severe measures. No notice was taken of this;

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after a lapse of time a document which began "By the Grace of GOD, etc." was served on him through the post. This brought an amazing, yet, at the same time, illuminating reply—something like this:—

"GENTLEMEN,

Your letter with enclosure has given me a terrible shock, so much so that I shall require help to overcome it; therefore I beg you to send me six dozen of the best Burgundy at once. I return the offending document, to which you are at liberty to add the cost of the wine and then do your damndest."

"Well, I never heard of such sauce."

"Nor I."

.

That's right, William; two glasses each.

Gentlemen, we must leave the delightful subject of Burgundy and get on with the Port, or at least those who feel so inclined. Personally, I am going to finish that Magnum of Romanée 1868, that is, unless any one else expresses a similar opinion.

You do, do you? Well then, let it be fifty-fifty.

Some from each decanter, please, William; the same as you go round the table. I am offering to you this evening a curious contrast, youth and

age—1908 and 1815 vintages. You may wonder at this strange selection. I will admit that it appears odd, one specimen venturing on maturity and the other well on the way to the grave.

Whilst you are contemplating these ruby vintages, I will tell you a most amusing yarn of a certain Duke, long since deceased. He was undoubtedly one of the two or three bottle men we hear of—most religiously did he, after his dinner, enjoy his two or three bottles of old vintage Port. However, to assist him in these orgies, he invariably invited one of his tenant farmers to join him, it always being a matter of surprise to every one that he should elect to have someone not mixing in his own society as his boon companion on these occasions.

I will enlighten you.

After dinner, comfortably seated at their table, these two would commence drinking their Port. After a time, when the supply required replenishing, His Grace would rise from the table, cross the room and pull the bell-cord. The summons was answered, when the farmer would say, "John, another bottle," and forthwith another bottle was brought. This emptied, when the same procedure took place—His Grace

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walked across the room, pulled the cord and the farmer ordered, "John, another bottle." This continued until such time that His Grace was carried up to bed and the jolly old farmer was left to sleep it off on the couch. Do you tumble to it?

"No."

Don't you see the excellent combination. The one could walk and not talk, whereas the other could talk and not walk.

Do look at our old connoisseur. He does love his Port. I will show you a picture in the other room which depicts him exactly. It is entitled "Bee's Wing."

"'Bee's Wing' did you say? That is just what I was admiring. To me it always indicates a wine of quality and age and reminds me of an 1851 Cockburn which had this charm; it was delightful. I suppose it really comes with age?"

In a way, yes. I take it that it is the final effort of the formation of a good crust, which in itself does not contain the density of an ordinary crust, and it is generally found on what is known as a pin-hole crust: this you may, or may not, have met with.

"I delight to see it, but is it not considered a drawback to have it in the glass?"

Oh dear, no. On the contrary. Unless you looked for it you would not notice it, and connoisseurs consider it an added charm in suspense. You can drink your glass of Port, or more if you wish, without any fear of being choked, or even inconvenienced.

"I notice that you are not taking Port; don't you ever indulge?"

Scarcely ever. I will tell you a curious thing that happened to me a short time ago. A dear old gentleman called at the office and invited me to go down to his country house in order to enjoy a bottle of his choice old vintage Cockburn. I made some suitable excuse, adding, moreover, that it was very seldom that I took a glass of Port. He raised his eyes and gazing at me intently, remarked, "Ah yes, I see it is so." I asked him for an explanation of his remark. He replied: "Why, you're fair; it is only dark people who are privileged to know how to drink Port."

Now, let me take a glance round the table. Well, I declare, all without exception have finished the Waterloo, having scarcely touched the youthful representative.

How do you account for that?

"I? Why, I much prefer it—so clean, such fine flavour and perfectly sound."



THE BEESWING

From an engraving by H. Dawe after M. W. Sharp

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"I agree with you. Comparisons, we know, are odious. This wonderful specimen makes the 1908 taste like treacle."

Had I asked any of you beforehand, you would have scorned the idea that the preference would have been accorded to the veteran; but I can assure you that the same thing happened on the last occasion I opened these two at the same time.

You must not run away with the idea that all 1815 Port, or, as a matter of fact, all Port of a like age, will be found to be good; it is the exception rather than the rule. So much depends on the way in which it has been kept.

Do I look upon Port as a great wine? And why is it so popular?

You have touched me on a vital spot. Just between ourselves and these four walls—No, I not only don't consider it a great wine, I don't consider it is a wine at all; that is, in the true sense of the word.

"For goodness sake, why not?"

I will answer that question by asking you one. What is wine?

"Had I not just heard what you have said, I should have said unhesitatingly, PORT."

I will tell you. Wine is the fully fermented juice of the grape.

“Well, isn’t Port?”

No, no. The next time that I go I must take you to see the manufacture of Port. I do not mean at home, but up the Douro; and very enjoyable you will find it, with every one so hospitable.

“I would just love to go; but tell us about Port. Why do you say it is not wine?”

For the simple reason that it is not the fully fermented juice of the grape; it is only one half fermented. When the fermentation has proceeded to about fifty per cent., it is stopped by the addition of spirit. If the juice of the grapes was permitted to take its natural course, I believe that it would develop into a coarse, hard, red wine, which might be used, if well diluted with water, for table purposes.

“You can say what you like, my friend, wine or not wine, it’s damned good, and don’t you decry it.”

Do not misunderstand, I do not decry it; for what it is, it is excellent; and as to its efficacy—well, we certainly owe to it the life of that great statesman, William Pitt, first Earl of Chatham. “Is that so; I had not heard of that before.”

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Oh, yes; he was so ill at about the age of fifteen that he had to give up his studies at Cambridge (he matriculated at fourteen) and return home. Here he was placed under the care of Dr. Addington, who recommended a very free use of PORT WINE. This had the desired effect, and at the age of eighteen his health was restored.

In spite of the charges laid at its door, it still enjoys and will continue to enjoy great popularity.

“What charges may I ask?”

How about gout?

“Pray do not mention that again; you have given me a twinge in the toe already. Oh! Oh! . . .”

Your mention of gout reminds me of an incident that occurred at the office some years ago. It was a bright, sunny morning, and we were busy at work when suddenly the door was flung open and, with the assistance of his footman, a gallant Admiral made his way in, with the additional help of a pair of crutches. Advancing a few steps, he exclaimed in a loud voice: “Mr. B——, my doctor is a d—— fool.” “Hush,” replied Mr. B——, “you must not say that.”

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"I do say it, and I repeat it—my doctor is a d—— fool."

"Whatever makes you say this?"

"Why, he has told me to come to you for Port Wine, the d—— fool, and look at me—so eaten up with gout that I can scarcely move about."

With a look of pity, the purveyor of this life-maintaining article made remark that it was hardly worth while going to a doctor unless he took his advice.

"Of course you *would* say that—collusion, collusion," he growled.

After further conversation the gallant Admiral, who had braved many things, decided to follow the doctor's instructions and ordered to be sent to his address six bottles of good old Port. A week or ten days passed, when on a certain afternoon the door opened and in walked the gallant Admiral, minus his crutches and not assisted by John, exclaiming as he passed down the office: "My doctor's not such a d—— fool as I thought. God bless him and you Mr. B——, too, for such an excellent cure."

There was the Admiral restored to health—the fact being that his previous medical

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advisers had knocked off so many things that his system had become impoverished, then with his slight tendency to gout, the enemy had come and prevailed. The old Port had given fresh life and health to the sufferer, and incidentally improved both his temper and his morals.

“This, I take it, was wine old in the wood, for an old wine that was old in bottle would have required considerable rest after it had been moved.”

Certainly, and I believe more wholesome—the same class of wine which is in use in Portugal, where it is reputed that gout is unknown.

Speaking of old crusted Port—most assuredly where there is a deposit, the trouble arises when this deposit is shaken off the inside of the bottle and becomes more or less disintegrated. In its composition there is a component part “tartar”, and in spite of the fact that the wine may appear to the eye quite bright, it yet requires more time to rest in order to overcome that slight bitterness which presents itself by reason of this tartar. I am a great believer in using well-shotted or granited bottles when bottling all wines likely to throw a deposit.

“Shotted or granited bottles, why? I don’t quite follow.”

Very simple, it roughens the inside of the bottle and thereby creates such a surface that the deposit will adhere firmly. With a smooth glass inside, the deposit will slip off, breaking at the slightest provocation.

“Why is this method not employed universally?”

In the case of Vintage Port it is more or less general, but with small bottlers the extra cost is taken into consideration. It is not so much the few shillings per gross extra for the bottles, but the fact that in using bottles which have been subjected to this treatment, the breakage during the process of “corking” is heavier, for when the bottle breaks the wine is spilled.

“I must remember this when there is another vintage to consider.”

Do you remember the old joke in *Punch*—the Squire and the new butler? The Squire, being very particular over his Port, facetiously inquired, when the bottle was brought in, “Did you shake the bottle, Jenkins?” “No, Sir, but I will.”

May I give you an old one from *Punch*, a great favourite in its time.

“We will suffer you. Carry on.”

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THE DAY OF PORTLY DIVINES

“When rectors drank Port Wine,
We parsons knew no strife;
We kept a middle line,
And led an easy life.
No parties vexed the church,
And every sound divine
Could roost upon his perch,
When rectors drank Port Wine.” etc.

“Tell me, do, would you place Sherry and Madeira in the same category?”

Certainly not. These wines are allowed to ferment until the fermentation ceases, after which a little spirit may be added in order to keep the wine as it is, and to prevent a secondary fermentation.

“You prefer Sherry, I take it?”

Yes, always; although I will admit that there is a time and a place for all things.

The mention of a place for all things has put me in mind of an incident that occurred some time ago, and in spite of the fact that it savours a little of commerce, I feel sure that you will forgive me when you have heard it. A sample of light Port had been forwarded to an old client, who, unknown to us, had just died.

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A reply came from the Widow on a deep black-edged card as follows:

"I am returning the sample bottle of Port sent, as alas Mr. — can no longer take any further interest in Port, light or otherwise.

Yours truly, —."

"Yes, that is indeed a good one. I wonder if the poor old warrior ever feels that he would like one now?"

I am afraid that you must continue to wonder.

The enemy Time is after us; we had better go into the other room and settle down to a glass of the Eau de Vie de Marc which figures on the menu.

"Eau de Vie de Marc—where does it come from?"

I thought you would ask that. Unless you have travelled in France and in the Burgundy district in particular, you are not likely to have met with this Brandy often. I say Brandy, but more correctly speaking, this "Eau de Vie." The bottle which we are to indulge in this evening comes from a little village not far from Dijon and is described as eighteen-sixty-five.

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I cannot say that I am able to enthuse very much over its merits, but I am offering it to you more by way of interest, following after our Burgundy sitting. The Marc is distilled in this district and is held in considerable favour by the natives.

It is distilled from the refuse—I might term it, the husks, the stalks, etc., etc., of the pressed grapes—so you must not expect too much.

“I find it very interesting. I have occasionally heard of it, but, candidly, did not know what it was.”

Citoyen Chaptal tells us that in Champagne it is known as Eau de Vie d’Aisne.

“What becomes of all this refuse in the ordinary way? There must be enormous quantities to be disposed of.”

Yes, that is so, but I would not like to tell you all I hear about its uses. It is, of course, utilised to a large extent as a dressing for the vineyards. It is also made into stacks in the manner of our hay stacks, great slices of which, having the appearance of cow cake, are cut out as required and used as food for pigs.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!”

Well, what are you laughing at?

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"Only the old Nursery Rhyme that it put in my mind:

The skins feed hogs,
And the hogs feed you, etc., etc."

I think that one of you had better take away his glass.

"Oh no, you don't."

"May I ask you a rather pertinent question?"

By all means.

"Is any of the refuse imported into this country, and, if so, for what purpose?"

As one occasionally reads in Parliamentary Reports, "No answer was given."

"I don't think that I should be induced to part with much gold for it. Nevertheless, I am grateful to you for affording me the opportunity of making its acquaintance."

"Do you mind if I have a wee drop more? I rather like it."

Help yourself, by all means. Pass the bottle to him.

What are *you* smiling at?"

"Only a line from Theodore Hook, which occurred to me when you said, 'Pass the bottle.'"

Well, let us have it.



From an engraving

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"When one is alone, the bottle does come round so often."

I am sorry that you were neglected.

"Not at all, not at all."

Tell me, you old rascal over there, how are you feeling?

"Oh! I am all right, thanks. Why do you ask?"

Because I thought when you arrived this evening that you were not looking quite up to the mark.

"I did feel a little peckish, I admit, but now I can agree with Homer, who wrote, 'The weary find new strength in generous wine.' "

He was right. I am of the opinion of Rabelais, who wrote that:

"The man's emphatically mad
Who drinks the best, yet can be sad."

"Bravo! May I just add one from the same old reprobate?"

Yes, do.

"He drinks in vaine, that feels not the pleasure of it."

Before we separate, seeing that you have given me the cue, I must quote those familiar lines of Howell to Lord Clifford,

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written in the early part of the seventeenth century:

“Good wine makes good blood.
Good blood causeth good humours.
Good humours cause good thoughts.
Good thoughts bring forth good works.
Good works carry a man to heaven.
Ergo,
Good wine carrieth a man to heaven.”

THE CHAMPAGNE DINNER

MENU OF THE CHAMPAGNE DINNER

Still Sillery.	Consommé Viseur.
1874 Ruinart.	
1919 Perrier Jouet.	Whitebait.
	Timbale de Riz de Veau
1911 Pol Roger.	Toulousaine.
1906 Vve. Clicquot.	Faisan en casserolle Bonne
	Femme.
1904 Pommery & Greno.	Haricots Vert Frais.
1899 Vve. Clicquot.	Ange à Cheval.
Tokay Essence.	
1811. 1834.	Friandises.
	Grande Champagne 1830.

CHAPTER III

"... and he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again: ... but he hanged the chief baker."

Genesis, xl. 21, 22.

THIS evening we must dismiss from our minds those still, yet exhilarating, wines which we have recently considered and turn our attention to the Sparkling Wines of Rheims and its neighbourhood.

To follow, we will have an extraordinary treat in the shape of one or two wines which are known as the "Essence" of Tokay, but I will not enlarge on these at the present. To follow these, we will intimately dwell on the product of the Grande Champagne, Charente.

As an *envoi*, I think that we should raise a glass to the immortal memory of Dom Perignon, the illustrious old monk who was the cellarer at the Abbey of Haut Villiers between the years 1670 and 1715. Through his daily intercourse with wine, he earned the reputation of having a palate of such extreme delicacy as to be able to distinguish what species of grapes were used

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in the making of any particular wine. It is to him that we owe the discovery of effervescent wine; so, Gentlemen, here's to his cunning.

I hope that the selection of wines which we have before us this evening will meet with your approval. I must admit that I am not very nervous on this score as I already know your tastes, but, alas, so many people these days delight in what may be called, perhaps a trifle exaggerated, glorified soda water—plenty of CO₂ and plenty of bang, and there you are—that's Champagne.

We are to consider wines of another category, as you will have noticed on the menu, commencing with a bottle of 1874 Sillery. The subtle piquancy of the sauce with the sole should not impair its excellence. Remember that the wine was never a Sparkling Wine, but was made STILL.

“I have never yet tasted Sillery, Still Champagne. It is not often met with, is it?”

Not in these days. I have but a few left of these. I have several bottles of 1865 Lanson, but it is heavier and not nearly so enjoyable as the wine we have before us; it is becoming, what I might term “slightly beery.” Do you understand?

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“Yes, I think so, but I must say that I rather like this.”

“So do I. A wonderful grapey flavour; jolly good.”

A number of years ago it was, but I recollect an evening we had with a collection of Sillery. If I remember correctly, we had 1857 Dagonet, 1865 Bollinger, 1868 Ruinart, 1868 Ayala and 1874 Pommery—no, the 'seventy-four was, I think, a wine of Moët and Chandon; anyway, it was a remarkable entertainment.

There was a young Irish Peer among the company. How he did love to talk about that evening and to discourse on fine wines in general—and he knew how to enjoy them! On one occasion, when I was staying with him in Ireland, I remember we were spending the morning in his cellar; he would insist on opening five or six bottles in order to select one suitable for lunch. I protested. His rejoinder was, “And what have you to complain about, any old how?”

I wonder if there is any one else living who can recall such a . . . a . . . —as Mr. Warner Allen would say—such a wonderful Lionysian Agape. We must, however, stop this incursion into the evergreen memory of past enjoyment

to consider what we have before us in the way of Champagne, that is, the sparkling variety, after which, we should be as fertile in conversation as was the Grand Old Man of whom Lord Houghton wrote:

“Trace we the workings of that wondrous brain,
Warmed by one bottle of our dry Champagne.”

“I was interested to hear about the Irishman’s cellar. I suppose that you often have occasion to look through, or, shall I say, inspect cellars in the country?”

Why, yes. Shall I briefly tell you of one or two little incidents which may occur to me?

“By all means do, while we make acquaintance with this first bottle, 1919 Perrier Jouet.”

I remember travelling down to a castle in South Wales some years ago. The owner wished to sell the contents of his cellar. He was a bit hard up—a very human failing—and being somewhat sympathetic, I offered him perhaps more than I should have done under other circumstances. The sum of a thousand pounds or thereabouts was not accepted, so I left without completing the deal. After a more mature consideration, or perhaps not being able to do better elsewhere, he wired accepting. Some

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years after, he came into the Office and said to me, "You won't remember me." Before he had time to continue, I chipped in, "Indeed I do; you are one of the few men I am not likely to forget." "Oh!" he said, "pray why?" "Because," I replied, "you are one of the few men out of whom I have made something." This rather nonplussed him, but he took it quite well.

In connection with this visit, I must tell you of a curious incident. A friend of mine happened to be in the Office when the arrangement was made for me to go down to inspect this cellar of wine. After the gentleman had gone out, my friend said to me, "Was that true what I heard, that you are going to so and so?" to which I replied, "Certainly, why, do you know the place?" He then said, "That is where I did my courting, but let me advise you that if it is necessary for you to stay there over night, you do so on one consideration, and that is that they do not put you in the Pink Room." I think it was the "Pink Room"; it might have been the "Rose Room" or the "Blue Room," but if my memory serves me right it was the "Pink Room." I asked him for an explanation, but he said, "You wait until you come back and I will tell you why."

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After having examined the contents of the cellar I had a cup of tea with the owner, who continued to induce me to increase my offer. The Butler came into the room with a message for his master. The master went out. The Butler returned and he said to me, "Are you staying the night, Sir?" Immediately my friend's warning came to my mind and I replied, "Oh! no, no thank you, the business has been completed; besides, tell me, if I did stay here, would you be placing me in the Pink Room?" "The Pink Room," he said; "what do you know about the Pink Room?" "Ah!" said I, "a little more than you think, but if I do have to stop, mind you, I refuse to stay in the Pink Room." "You need not fear that," he said, "the Pink Room has not been opened for some years and is not likely to be."

On my return to the Office the next week, I again saw my friend and he inquired, "Well, how did you get on at so-and-so? Did you stop there the night?" I told him what had happened and I begged of him to tell me the reason of warning me against sleeping in the Pink Room, . . . this is what he related.

"Some years ago, as I told you, I was courting at that very place. The gentleman of the house

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was very fond of a good glass of Port and he knew that I was too. The first evening after my arrival we opened a bottle of his 1868 Port and most excellent it was, and I am not ashamed to say that we finished the bottle. The following morning, when I came down to breakfast, Mrs. So-and-so said to me, 'Well, A——, how are you this morning? Did you sleep well?' 'Oh! yes, thank you, very well indeed.' 'Now, are you quite sure that you slept well?' 'Certainly, certainly.' 'Ah! that is splendid,' she said.

"That repeated question as to whether I had slept well occurred to me during the day and at the same time a terrible dream I had experienced came to my mind, but I dismissed it. That evening we had a bottle of, if I remember rightly, 1878 Port and good it was; not a drop was left in that bottle. The same thing occurred that night. Next morning Mrs. So-and-so greeted me in the same way and emphasised very strongly, 'Are you quite sure that you slept very well? You saw or heard nothing untoward?'

"During the day I decided not to indulge in Port, thinking that the wine I had consumed with the old gentleman had probably caused me to have the same bad dream two nights in

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succession, so after dinner when another bottle of the 1878, which we had praised so the evening before, was brought in, much to the distress and consternation of my host, I refused to share it with him.

“I went to bed, I can assure you, on this occasion more than particularly sober, not that I ever did otherwise. Now, my friend, this is what happened and this is what I warned you against.

“In the early hours of the morning, I was awakened by the door opening and a most beautiful creature in white entering the room. I raised myself up in bed on my elbow and stared hard for a minute. There most assuredly was a beautiful lady. ‘What can I do for you,’ I ventured to say, ‘come over here! You need not leave.’ I, as it were, naturally moved a little in order to make room. She faltered as she glided by me, but I noticed there was a terribly pained look on her face. ‘What is your trouble?’ I asked, and I don’t mind admitting that I began to feel a little nervous. Suddenly, as she returned, she leant over the bed on which I was lying and allowed her hands to fall. A most terrible wound in her throat was disclosed, and it appeared to me (though I may have been



From a colour print by Rowlandson

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wrong) that the blood was actually trickling from her neck. I started, but before I could do or say anything, she, or what was evidently an apparition, had disappeared.

"Now, my friend, this is gospel truth and the reason why I warned you not to sleep in that particular room. It is evident that the Butler knew something, although he contented himself by simply informing you that the room had not been used for so many years. I can assure you my hostess had a few words to give by way of explanation the next morning."

"It was a source of great comfort to know that this extraordinary experience was in no way brought about by the effect of the excellent Port we had enjoyed."

I remember in a Castle in the North of Wales visiting a most interesting old cellar. In this cellar I saw the largest specimen of weevil in a cork that I have ever seen. It must have been half an inch long. I brought it home in a matchbox, in triumph.

"Weevil. What is that?"

A nasty greedy grub that attacks the corks, making its way from one cork to another. It is a terrible scourge to have in one's cellar, being the cause of much damage. You will find

it, or I should say that it has been my experience to find it, in bins in which sawdust has been used. There it is the cause of much damage.

I remember travelling to Cimiez just in time to stop the builders from installing hot-water pipes through a cellar destined to contain quantities of the choicest vintages. This seems to be a failing with Architects and Builders.

I remember a visit to an old Count in La Vendée, in whose cellar there were upwards of five hundred varieties of wines, for all of which I arranged a new resting-place.

I remember in the South of Ireland, I was just in time to prevent a client from sacrificing his old Port, he having come to the conclusion that the corks were all bad, whereas the fault lay entirely with the corkscrew.

I also remember finding a quantity of bottles of 1865 Moët piled away with the empty bottles in a large cellar in the West of England. The Squire happened to be with me at the time. "Findings are keepings," he said, "you can have those," and dashed good they were too.

On one occasion in an extensive cellar in the West Riding, I found a bin containing about thirty dozens of ancient Madeira for which the new Baronet had paid one hundred and twenty

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shillings per dozen, valued from the list as shown in the Cellar Book. I pulled it all down. There were not a dozen bottles sufficiently full to be commercial, or, in fact, fit to drink . . . the depredations of the weevil.

And so I could continue, but we must get on with our work in hand.

“Apropos to these old cellars of wine, is there any truth in what a friend once told me—that in the old days only certain privileged persons were allowed to keep wine in their houses?”

Oh, yes! up to a limited quantity, but that was a long time ago. I think what your friend must have referred to was a statute of King Edward VI. entitled an “Act to avoid Excesse of Wynes.” Amongst other rules it enacted that—

“None but such as can spend one hundred marks of yearly rent, or is worth one thousand marks, or else shall be the son of a Duke, Marquis, Earl, Viscount, or Baron of the realm, shall have, or keep in his house, any vessel of foreign wine, for his family use, exceeding ten gallons, under a penalty of ten pounds for every such offence.

Merchants may use in their own houses, but not sell, such wines as they shall import: also, high sheriffs, magistrates of cities and towns, and the inhabitants of fortified towns, may keep vessels of wine for their own consumption only.”

VINIANA

William, the 1911 Pol Roger, and just replenish the first glasses.

"Carry on—a few more of your interesting reminiscences."

Well, I remember on more than one occasion spending a week in the Lake District, awaiting the advent of the Squire who never turned up. Something for nothing, if you like. "Did he pay your expenses while you were waiting for him?"

Don't be silly. I could go on with scores of instances. And I have invariably been treated handsomely—sometimes almost fêted.

But I *do* remember that to oblige a client I gave up my free Saturday to go down to the Midlands in order to advise him on his cellar of old wines. Lunch-time came. I was ushered into a sort of pantry to partake of my meal *solus*. The Butler entered and in a shamefaced whisper said, "The Squire is very sorry he has no beer in the house, would you like a Stone Ginger?"

After that we must make a move.

The first wine, nineteen Perrier Jouet, is taken more or less with the idea of dissipating the ethers of the Sillery, so that we can approach the older wines with the palate in harmony.

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“Nineteen was a good vintage, was it not?”

Certainly, very good, so were the Vintages of 1920 and 1921—nothing much to choose between them. The 1921's will prove perhaps a trifle more attractive, the grapes having been so very ripe. I don't mind telling you that I have some of each Vintage put by. It is only a precaution against the difficulty of finding extra quality Champagne during the next few years, there having been so many failures of late.

This second glass is 1911 Pol Roger—one of the best of the elevens.

“The Perrier Jouet wants a lot of beating.”

I agree with you. If anyone wished to make me a present of a case of Champagne, I should say 1911 Perrier Jouet. I recollect being in Epernay when the wine was being made and the principal of the firm Le Vieux Gallice, with whom I was, made the remark, “This will be a magnificent wine. It is our centenary year and we are out to offer the public ‘*un vin magnifique*’,” emphasising his remark with the usual extension of hands, raising of shoulders, and repeating “*Mon Dieu*.”

On each occasion I am fortunate enough to have a glass, I think of this and say to myself, “How well he succeeded.”

VINIANA

"It must have been a masterpiece if it outrivalled this 1911 Pol Roger, which I find to be so excellent."

Agreed, now for the next. . . . William, we are quite ready for number three.

This is 1906 Clicquot.

"What marvellous life for a wine so old."

It proves that it must have been kept in a proper cellar, cool and dry with no great variations of temperature. Champagne must never be kept in a damp cellar, the dampness affects the wire, which then loses its strength; the CO₂ gradually forces the cork, thus causing the wine to become flat. There is much difference between a wine being flat and a wine being still.

Pommery 1904 please. . . . What a classic!!

"A trifle too severe for my taste."

I know it is for some people, but to me it is *it* and *oh!* so wholesome.

"I am of your opinion. To me it is perfection. I even prefer it to the Clicquot 1906."

It's a matter of choice.

"They are beautiful wines, with the advantage of age."

Now for the widow 1899. . . . What a nose!!

Don't gulp it down, take your time over it and ponder on its flavour and preservation.

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"Extraordinary. What life!!"

What is your opinion my dear fellow, at the end of the table?

"Mine? Well, well, well . . . have you got me?"

Yes, something like the old fogies in Daumier's picture.

"Exactly."

"May I have a look at the cork of the last bottle?"

By all means. William, pass over the cork of the last bottle. What do you think of it?

"It is like a piece of iron."

Only time can do that. By the way, your remark on the cork reminds me of a most amusing incident which you must forgive me for telling you. A Partner in a well-known firm of West End Auctioneers called at the Office one day in the company of a well-dressed young man and asked us if we could help him to appease the wrath of this client. On inquiring what the difficulty was, it transpired that he accused the Auctioneers of swindling him. He had bought at their recent Auction Sale a certain lot comprising, as catalogued, four dozen pints 1906 Champagne Pol Roger. I think that it was four dozen; I know that it was Pol

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Roger, but about the quantity I may be wrong. He had paid for them and collected them. He had opened one half bottle the previous evening and had come to the conclusion that the wine was bad and that he had been had. The price which he had paid was absurdly low.

On looking at the offending bottle we immediately offered to buy it from him at twice the price he had paid. This he described as collusion and an attempt to evade responsibility. "Open the bottle," he said, "and if you know anything about it, you will soon see that I am right in my assertion that I have been swindled."

The half bottle was opened, and on smelling and tasting the wine we confirmed, without hesitation, our offer, adding that we considered that the wine was excellent.

"A put-up job," he exclaimed, "look again. How can it be possible that this wine is 1906 as catalogued?"

To humour him we repeated the delicate operation, which only confirmed us in our opinion.

He then, as it were, half snatched the cork from our hand and, in an excited manner,

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almost shouted, "Well, well, what about that?" holding up the cork, "will that satisfy you? How can it possibly be nineteen-six wine? Why, the cork has not yet commenced to swell."

It was a perfect little cork, hard as iron, similar to the one which we have just been admiring.

"Well, what happened?"

Don't ask. I had been too honest. We did not get the Champagne.

Do you mind if I tell you of a little incident which happened to a friend of mine the other evening? He was seated next to a charming young lady at table, and by way of making conversation he remarked to her, referring to the Champagne which she had just sipped, "Do you like Champagne, Miss ——?" "No," she replied, "to be quite candid, I hate it." "Why do you drink it then," he asked. "Because it makes me feel so nice."

"Delightful child, you must ask your friend to introduce me to the lady."

Shall I tell you of another Champagne incident which happened to me?

"Yes, do, do, but you cannot beat the one about the cork."

Then listen.

VINIANA

It was early in 1918. I was entertaining at a certain Club two brother officers and had ordered a bottle, an Imperial Quart, of Krug Champagne. I forget the vintage; I rather think that it was 1895. I thought an Imperial Quart, quite an uncommon size, would about suffice. The bottle was duly brought, placed upon the table, and I took hold of it—"warm"!—so I ventured to ask for an ice bucket.

This was brought after a considerable lapse of time, and as the waiter was going away, I called him back, saying, "Put the wine on the ice."

A minute after, I instinctively looked round to see that it was all right, when to my amazement, what do you think was happening? He was pouring the wine into the bucket.

What the . . . , etc., etc., naturally followed, when, with a more or less blank look on his face, he replied, "You told me to put the wine on the ice, didn't you?"

"Well! that beats everything I have heard."

It is rather rich, isn't it? but I'll tell you another that almost caps it.

Some time ago I was relating this incident to an old friend, when he replied that he could, from his own experience, almost equal it for

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absurdity. This is what happened to him. Some time previous he was dining at a very well-known Restaurant in the West End and had ordered a bottle of the Widow ninety-two, a magnificent wine. After some time, the bottle not being forthcoming, he inquired where it was and he was politely informed that it was in front of the fire getting warm. You can imagine what happened. The only explanation that he received was that the waiter remembered that this particular gentleman had had a bottle of old Claret a few days previously and had requested that the bottle should be stood in front of the fire for a few minutes.

"Almost incredible."

What were you about to say?

"Oh! I don't wish to interrupt, but I have finished my ninety-nine Clicquot."

Sorry, there is no more in the bottle. It is as dry as a bone.

"I did not mean that. I was about to say what a wonderful wine, a taste of the grape, which seems to be lacking in the young wines."

Quite so, the flavour, the bouquet, and the ethers, you should know grow with age.

"Give me the old wine in future, I say."

VINIANA

Yes, if it is to be found. . . . I'll ring for William. William, you will find two bottles of Tokay standing in the cool of the pantry by the window. Bring them here very carefully; they are very precious.

We must leave the Champagne for the time being, as I am going to give you a great treat in the shape of the Essence of Tokay. Maybe some of you have never tasted this wine before, although you must have frequently heard of, or about it. It will be a revelation to you.

That's right, William, use the special Brandy glasses.

This particular wine, as I was about to tell you, is almost historic. It was formerly the property of the Princely House of Bretzenheim, which became extinct in the Year of Grace 1863. It was walled up during the Hungarian Revolution of 1849 and was only re-discovered in 1925.

While I am telling you one or two incidents concerning this remarkable wine, you can fondle it in the glass, take a sip now and again, and, as it were, breathe it into your very soul. In recent years, it has been borne in upon me in a very convincing manner that this wine—the Essence of Tokay—has a most wonderful effect

in cases of extreme illness. As you will perceive, it has a minimum of alcohol, yet I can assure you that it contains as its hidden virtue a maximum of nourishment. As a matter of fact, it is almost a crime to drink it in the way we are doing. It should be jealously hoarded up for use in cases of illness, pulmonary troubles in particular. Perhaps I can better explain by use of a simple simile. If one has a sore, healing ointment is applied. It is useless to use the ointment if there is no sore, so it is with the Essence of Tokay. If you were to read some of the old books referring to this wine, you would begin to understand and believe somewhat of its nature and virtue. Emperors, Kings and Princes in bygone years have always considered it as their most cherished possession, using it as the means of passing a compliment or extending a precious gift to contemporary monarchs.

We know that the venerable old Pope Leo XIII. lingered on to a very advanced age. We were in the habit of opening our morning paper and exclaiming to ourselves, "He is still alive, how wonderful!" I will tell you what kept him alive—Tokay Essence sent to him direct from the Emperor of Austria. I believe that I am correct in saying that for the last six or eight

weeks of his life, nothing passed his lips save this immortal liquor.

"I was reading in the Press only a short time ago about this particular wine in reference to King Edward and I was much interested."

My good friend, you must not believe all that you read. Now let me bury this bogey once and for all. I will tell you exactly what did happen.

When our good King Edward VII., bless his memory, was taken suddenly ill, and the coronation had to be postponed, I was at the office, in fact had stayed there all through the night. Early in the morning a messenger arrived from the Palace inquiring if we had any Tokay Essence, as their small stock was at Windsor. Unfortunately we had none, but remembering one or two clients in London who had bought some, I promised to try and obtain a bottle or two. I, therefore, hailed a hansom and set out. The first call drew a blank. On approaching the residence of the second, it was necessary to take a sharp turn into the "Gardens," when, by the most extraordinary chance, the wheels of my hansom collided with those of a hansom coming from the opposite direction.

There was some altercation between the

Cabbies. The "fare" from the on-coming cab alighted, and who should I recognise but the gentleman for whom I was in quest. We soon forgot the cause of the trouble and hurried back to his house, where to my delight we found a couple of bottles of the precious nectar. With these I hurried off, profuse with thanks, and delivered them straightway to the Palace.

Whether any Tokay, maybe from Windsor, was used or not, I will not pretend to say; but the inference is that it would not have been asked for had it not been either required or considered advisable to have in readiness in case of emergencies.

"I wonder what it is that makes it so valuable in every sense of the word?"

I really do not pretend to know. It is one of the indescribable mysteries of nature. All I can tell you is that it is rich in phosphates of magnesia and of lime, besides which it contains ethers and other valuable properties. Warner Allen wrote a booklet on this wine, which is both instructive and interesting.

I am no chemist. All that I am telling you is, I can assure you, from personal experience. Perhaps you would like me to read to you one or two letters which I have in my desk from

VINIANA

those who have tried and benefited by this wonderful wine. Excuse me one moment.

Now then, listen to these—

“I am pleased to say that the Tokay has already had a most beneficial effect. I have just received a letter from my wife written this morning in which she says, ‘Mother had a good night and we are certain it is owing to the Tokay. We gave her one or two teaspoonsful every few hours, and instead of having a strychnine injection every four or five hours she went a good twelve hours without an injection and was also much quieter in her sleep and did not wander at all. This morning she is much brighter than she has been for many days.’ I feel sure you will be interested to hear this as it fully bears out all you told me about this wonderful wine. I am afraid it is a hopeless case, but it is a great blessing to have found something like this to alleviate the suffering.”

“Remarkable. Did she get better?”

Just listen to a letter that followed shortly after—

“I am pleased to say that . . . is very much better and is now out of danger, and there can be no doubt but that this Tokay has been of the greatest assistance in stimulating the action of the heart and in inducing sleep. When I sent it down a fortnight ago we all thought it was a hopeless case, but after

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the first dose a remarkable change took place and Mrs. ——— was able to do without the strychnine injection. It is really wonderful and seems almost like a miracle.”

I can assure you that these letters were absolutely unsolicited. May I bore you with one or two short letters from the faculty?

“Yes, do, do. You won’t bore us, it is most interesting.”

Here is one. Of course, I cannot give you the names of the writers, that would be a breach of confidence, but I am able to tell you that they emanate from the top of the profession.

“Let me thank you once more for the second bottle of Tokay which you have kindly sent me. Physicians do not write laudatory opinions of wine and proprietary products; but they have many opportunities to recommend those which they consider valuable. You may trust to my discrimination, for I have already put the Tokay to proof.”

Here’s another.

“I have no doubt of the value of the Tokay in all diseases accompanied by great exhaustion and debility; in a case of Diabetes with gangrene it was of the greatest help to the patient and the only article of diet which he really enjoyed to the last.”

I will not inflict any more of these letters on

you, but I will, if you wish, give you another personal experience.

A medical man, and a friend, who had sneered at the suggestion to try this wine in a case of extreme illness, actually put a little in a man's mouth, a patient who was none other than his father-in-law, when he really had come to the conclusion that he had passed away. My friend told me afterwards that the effect was like an electric shock—the old gentleman is alive to-day and, believe me, this is no fairy tale.

"It almost sounds like one."

I agree.

"Tell us some more."

Well, I remember a dear friend whose wife had had, what he described as a terrible confinement; in fact, he was not only despondent, but despairing. He telephoned to me: I answered here from the next room—it was late, eleven o'clock. I sympathised with him and said as a means of more practical sympathy that I would bring along to him something which I considered the only thing likely to be of any use, but I added, "I am not going to walk two or three miles at this time of night unless you promise to give it to her." After much arguing, etc., etc., he promised. I met him half-way and

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gave him the bottle of Tokay Essence. I 'phoned through to him the next morning. He told me that the doctor had just left and admitted to being nonplussed at the good turn the patient had taken. I understood that neither he nor the nurse gave their "interference" away. The balance of the bottle is, I believe, carefully stored away for the next occasion!!

This reminds me of another incident, when my private telephone was brought into action. It was late one Saturday night when the bell rang. On answering it, a lady (with tears in her eyes, which I could almost see) beseeched me to find her a bottle of old Brandy; she would come down for it herself—it was already very late. Her little boy was dying with double pneumonia; he could keep nothing down and the doctor had practically given up hope. All she could give him was a little drop of old Brandy from a teaspoon and the only bottle that she had was finished—I rather gathered had accidentally been broken.

Here was one of those opportunities of doing a good turn. I promised to come up to town and bring her a bottle of old Brandy. I took with me also a bottle of this famous Tokay. I implored her to give some of the Tokay to the child.

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She consulted the nurse; they had better wait until they had the doctor's permission. This made me feel quite cross. "If you will not give it to him," I said, "I shall take it back with me and you can carry on with the Brandy, but take my advice and use this present means of grace."

Well, I suppose that I talked them into it, for they went to the sick child, gave him a few drops from a spoon and were astounded that he did not return it. It was the first thing that he had kept down for days. To make a long story short, he got better, is alive to-day and is a great big fellow—thus I was well repaid.

Would you care for another? I get so enthusiastic over this wine that I could go on till doomsday.

"Yes, by all means."

Some years ago I induced a man to take some for his dying sister. This also, if I recollect aright, was lung trouble. About a week later he called at the Office and in an awed voice said, "... it's done the trick, she is much better ... thank God and you." He proceeded to tell me that she had for some time lain on her back helpless, and when he came for the Tokay he thought that she would have died before

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he returned with it. "Believe me," he added, "when I left her just now she was half sitting up, leaning on her arm which was resting on the pillow. Such happiness makes it difficult to control that little lump in the throat that will at times assert itself." And I was pleased too, very pleased.

A client some years ago was anxious to take a few bottles across the Atlantic with him against the time that he might find some occasion to use it. A few years after he wrote saying that he had had reason to use it and the effect was marvellous; its use had saved a dear friend's life, and he added, "Please send me some more, it will certainly take the screw out of the coffin lid"—not the most genteel expression, but very expressive of the powers he considered the wine possessed. This was before prohibition—the dear friends must die now.

An instance of the unimpeachable virtues of the vine!!

"Do you mind?"

What?

"Just to pass the bottle."

It is empty, I think. No, there is a drop of the 1834 remaining, and as no one else appears to want it, we will use it, in order to raise the

glass to Bacchus—so here's to the jolly old God of Wine—To Bacchus!

“By the way, do you remember what Plutarch said about him?”

Cannot say that I do. What was it?

“He said that ‘Bacchus was not more esteemed for being the first inventor of wine, than of the ivy crown, which so powerfully corrected its inebriating qualities’.”

It is sad to think that there is very little probability of the Essence of Tokay being made in the future.

“You do not mean to say that that is the case?”

I fear that it is so, it is so very costly to make, and besides, the celebrated estates formerly belonging to the Royal and Imperial House and others connected with them have passed into other and very different hands.

“It always was very expensive. I remember reading somewhere that at the sale of the cellar of old ‘Q’ the Tokay fetched £150 per dozen.”

Yes, that was so, and you must remember that the bottles were only of a capacity of half a litre.

“People used to leave fine cellars behind them in those days?”

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They did indeed, but the inestimable practice is fast disappearing.

One of the largest cellars of wine left to an heir was, I believe, that left by Hortensius, including ten thousand casks of Chian Wine.

Before we retire to the other room I will give you those pretty lines adapted from Korner—

“All the splendours of the South,
Something fairer e’en than they.
Joys of love and glow of youth
Live in Vineyards of Tokay.
In the goblet liquid gold
Shines more bright than stars above,
He who quaffs it grows not old,
And never bids adieu to love.”

.

Now let us make ourselves quite comfortable, for we are to enjoy something—well, you wait. No smoking for at least, shall we say, half an hour or so. I have had the room carefully aired, and before we came into dinner William was instructed to use my little Brandy spray. For the contemplation of such a work of art as we are about to enjoy, the setting cannot be too carefully considered. I will help to while away the time with a few remarks and a few anecdotes on the Water of Life.

VINIANA

The particular Brandy which we have before us is Grande Champagne of the year 1830. Believe me, there is no doubt about it; it is absolutely pure and unadulterated eighteen-thirty. I will read to you what is printed on the label—

BRUT ABSOLU DISTILLED AND BOTTLED IN FRANCE

Careful inquiries have been made as to the real age of this remarkable Brandy and we have been able to ascertain that it has remained in the same family of wealthy proprietors of Genté, in the heart of the Grande Champagne, ever since it has been made. Our friends in the Charente have known the family for over fifty years and are absolutely certain that the Brandy is real 1830, also that it has never been touched or refreshed: natural strength 37 u.p. Sykes.

“Very interesting certainly, but what is a label wanted for? The Brandy speaks for itself. Smell it—what a message!”

You are right up to a certain point; however, a label is useful, if authentic, to indicate the nature of what we are to expect; besides, it helps to avoid mistakes in the cellar.

Some years ago we had some of the finest Brandy shipped bearing the label “Cooking



SIGNOR AMBROGETTI IN THE CHARACTER OF
DON GIOVANNI

From an engraving after J. Partridge

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Brandy." We daily ask for protection from temptation; therefore, concluded that it was incumbent on us to avoid offering such an alluring temptation to those who would handle the Brandy whilst *en route* to us.

"Was the ruse successful?"

Quite.

While we are on the subject of the label, I feel that I would like to relate to you an incident in connection with this very label which is, to say the least, amusing.

I was very particular about it, being anxious that it should prove correct and worthy of its object. Two or three times the representative of the Printers called with a proof, none of which I considered sufficiently good. On the last occasion he called and handing the label to me, ventured to remark, "I hope to goodness that this will satisfy you." The tone in which this was said caused me to look up sharply and ask, somewhat abruptly perhaps, "Why?" "I'll tell you," he said. "This blinking label is getting on my nerves and will be the death of me. Believe me, last night I had a sort of nightmare over it. I dreamt that I was in a coach driving around in an unknown country, up hill and down dale, up hill again. On and on and at such a speed—

VINIANA

my heart was in my mouth—when the driver suddenly pulled up and turning to the passengers exclaimed, pointing to a small hamlet in the valley, ‘There’s the place, Gentlemen.’ There was a hushed moment” (and as he told me this he wiped his forehead with his handkerchief), “then one passenger asked, ‘What place?’ ‘The place where the Brandy is, you fool.’”

I could not refrain from smiling, when he added “It is all very well for you to smile, but it cannot go on like this. Do say, do, that you are satisfied.”

I was—you see the result in front of you.

Speaking of the use or the necessity of a label, reminds me of a very remarkable incident that happened to a friend of mine some few years ago. He was staying at a large Hotel in the Midlands. One evening he ordered a bottle of a particular wine—Hock, I believe he told me—something very choice. The bottle came, the wine served, and immediately it was obvious that an inferior wine had been substituted. There was a rumpus, heated argument, threats of all kinds, and eventually the Manager, to appease my friend, said that he would go down to the Cellar himself and find out if by any possible chance a mistake could have been

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made. He returned with the following explanation: "You are quite correct, Sir, and I apologise. You did not have the wine you ordered and this is what happened. In the bin containing that wine there has unfortunately been a breakage and the escaping wine evidently washed off a label from one of the bottles which fell on to a bottle of the inexpensive Hock in the bin beneath. The Cellar Clerk, knowing what wine he had to fetch and having caught sight of this particular bottle bearing the label, concluded that it must have been a bottle called for and returned and carelessly put back in the wrong bin, so he sent it up."

"Scandalous; some ingenuity though."

But allow me—more remarkable still. I related this to a friend the other day who happened to be lunching with me and he replied, "How extraordinary; believe me, that is precisely what happened to A.H. a short time ago in a high-class German Restaurant. In his case, he ordered his own wine, wine he had actually made himself and he knew it perfectly well."

"Astonishing. I wonder of what nationality was the Manager of the Hotel in the Midlands?"

While considering this unique Brandy, would

VINIANA

you care for me to give you a few rather plain and hard facts about Brandy in general?

"By all means, carry on."

First of all, what is Brandy?

Brandy is distilled from Wine. Any Spirit not distilled from the product of the grape is not entitled to be called "Brandy" (however clever the imitation).

Cognac is Brandy from the Charente District of France and no other Brandy is entitled to be called "Cognac" (however good it may be).

The Charente District is divided into Grande Champagne, Petite Champagne, Fins Bois and Borderies, and it is one of nature's gifts to La Belle France that this particular part of her country does give her best by virtue of its aspects, its soil and its general position.

Brandy has its invaluable uses. For a thirsty person who cannot digest ales or stouts and who does not care for the manufactured article which emanates from the other side of the Tweed, Brandy is at once refreshing and stimulating. For this purpose a Cognac of six or seven years' age will suffice.

Taking necessity before luxury, Brandy has its universal use as a medicine and undoubtedly it is very beneficial in cases of illness. Here an

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older Brandy is necessary, for it is the ethers in Brandy which grow with age that give these beneficial properties, whereby the action of the heart is stimulated and the whole nervous system invigorated.

Last, but by no means least, comes the very old Brandy or of great age, of the finest quality from the Grande Champagne or Fins Bois Districts.

There is nothing which reaches so nearly to perfection as the finest specimen of old Grande Champagne. Names and dates stand for little—the veritable article will speak for itself and it has a most alluring insinuating sweet tone in its voice. There is no Liqueur to be compared with it. It is ideal after dinner; it cleanses the palate and its superfine qualities appeal to all that is best in the human mind. So superb an article should be treated with the utmost respect. In practically any walk of life the cultured mind will rise to the circumstances of the moment, and yet how many will toss off a Liqueur Brandy without a thought.

It should be served in suitable glasses, tulip-shaped and light in weight, not too large, and in no circumstances in those stupid oddities known as Liqueur Glasses. The stem should be slender,

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and when the priceless nectar has been served, the glass should be held in the right hand between the second and third fingers until such time as the Brandy has taken the warmth of the touch—that is the ideal temperature. While it is being obtained, there need be no waste of time, *au contraire*, for the glass can be gently turned in the hand, this way and that way, and by thus enjoying the fragrance with its stimulating effect the senses will give timely warning to all the members of the body of what a treat there is in store; DON'T HURRY IT, and when the psychological moment does arrive, don't gulp it down, but gently leaning back the head, place the fine rim of the glass on the lower lip, allow a little to escape, but not too much, and as often as not, if one knows how to appreciate the finesse, it will be depicted on the face by the uplifted eyebrow.

You ask what is the significance of the word "Champagne" in reference to Brandy.

I will tell you of the word "Champagne" and its original meaning, in opposition of the words "Champs" and "Bois". The "champ," a field, is a space, cultivated or uncultivated, where there are no trees as a rule. By extension of the meaning of the word to large spaces, the name

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“Champagne” or “terre des Champs” has been given to whole districts, hills or high plains, dry, sparsely timbered, with a sub-soil of chalk or limestone. These are exactly the characters of both the Champagnes of the Charente and of the hills and plains of the old French Province of Champagne. In both you have exactly the same nature of the soil, which is chalky, and the same rather bare, arid landscape.

The word “Champagne” is thus more than a territorial name. It conveys the meaning of a certain kind of soil and of a certain nature of country. The bare and monotonous country which surrounds Rome and which the Italians call “Agro Romano” is called in French “Campagne Romaine,” and there the word “campagne” has very much the same meaning as “Champagne.”

On the other hand, the low-lying ground, with clay as a sub-soil, where trees grow well and where the country is well watered and green, is sometimes called “Bocage.” You find this name applied to one of the districts of the Vendée, “le Bocage Vendéen.” In the Cognac district, “bocage” has become “Bois,” including the growths of the Fins Bois or Grands Bois and Bois ordinaires, with clay as a sub-soil and an

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aspect of the country quite different from that of the Champagne.

I have actually heard of a bottle of Champagne Cognac being returned, with the intimation that Brandy was required, *not* Champagne!!

I notice that this little dissertation has had such effect on the glasses that we must circulate the bottle again.

What do you think of it?

"I have no words to express what I think—it is marvellous. Do you notice how, when the ether, the bouquet, passes the back of the nose, what a subtle trail it leaves in its wake?"

Taissez-vous!

"Pardon, my friend, I thank you for bringing me to earth. I always get so very enthusiastic over Grande Champagne, that *is* Grande Champagne."

Granted, I assure you, but pray don't get maudlin as if you were fondling something beautifully human.

"Well, I'll desist——"

I can tell you that it is not everyone who knows how to appreciate such nectar. I was able to have a sly hit back at a nobleman on one occasion. He had had a bottle, and after considering it, he wrote, "I have tasted your

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Brandy, but do not care for it; in fact, I do not like it at all—to my mind, it is not even fit for cooking purposes.” To which I replied: “You are quite right, My Lord, the Brandy in question is totally unsuitable for the purpose you mention.”

“How do you account for that?”

Well, he did not know—that is the long and short of it.

“It is indeed a wonderful Brandy.”

Would you like to enjoy it in silence, or shall I relate to you one or two interesting incidents about Brandy, as they occur to me?

“By all means continue. We delight in them.” You have doubtless heard a great deal about Napoleon Brandy. To my mind, it is a snare, a delusion. Why! I remember a certain occasion when a man called on me with the set purpose of offering me some “genuine” Napoleon Brandy. I humoured him by tasting his Brandy. I then showed him a sample of superior Brandy at a fraction of the price he was asking. He went out somewhat subdued. After a few minutes he returned and actually had the effrontery to say, “I see that you have some decent Brandy. I’ll tell you what. I’ll sell you the bottles—as many as you like. I have them made in the

South of France and can ship them to you in any quantities." I soon hoofed him out. On making inquiries about him afterwards, I was able to ascertain that what he said was true.

"Excuse me a minute. But what is that curious little picture hanging over there with one of the men holding a scroll marked 'Pattent for Wine'?"

Oh, that! Why, that is an interesting old print of a couple of rascals who lived in the time of Charles I.: William Abell—better known as Cain's brother—and Richard Kilvert, the former an Alderman and the latter a Liveryman of the City of London. There had been some trouble between the Vintners Company and the Crown, which was patched up through the medium of Abell. A new duty was levied, and he was nominated one of the farmers of this new impost. He made a fortune out of it, became very unpopular, and was on more than one occasion imprisoned and heavily fined for his delinquencies. There is an engraving of him by Hollar which I would like to possess. Written above is, "Good Wine needs not A-bush nor A-bell".

"Do you know how the saying 'Good wine needs no bush' originated?"



*H. Uderman, Helt and Richard Kilvert,
the two wine Proprietors for Wine 1655.*

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Well, I am afraid I cannot help you very much, but all I do know is that the Bush was a favourite tavern sign in ancient Rome, whence we derive the proverb, "Good wine needs no bush," or, as the Romans expressed it, "*Vino vendibili hedera non est opus*".

"Oh, yes; I think I can add to that."

Well, do, by all means.

"I remember that it is referred to in the Epilogue of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, and also, if I remember aright, the phrase occurs in the 'Moral Maxims' of Publilius Syrus, who flourished in the days of Julius Caesar."

You see that picture on the wall over there? That is my old friend Edwin Cleary, and it reminds me of a most amusing incident that occurred some years ago. He called in at the office inquiring for a bottle of old Sazerac Brandy. As he was evidently interested in this particular Brandy I promised, if possible, to procure for him a bottle of veritable old Sazerac. I was able to gratify his desire, and when I enquired of him why he was so anxious to have this particular Brandy, he related, in the way in which only dear old Cleary could, the following narrative:

"Years back, when not much more than a boy,

in company with my father and my brother, on a certain afternoon, I was pulling down the river to ——. ‘Pull, boys,’ urged the old gentleman, ‘pull away, and if you reach the landing stage before dark, we’ll have that bottle of old Sazerac which I have in the locker and you shall enjoy a drop of real nectar.’

“Indeed, we pulled for all we were worth. Had we not heard the praises, the encomiums, on this bottle before! We reached our destination in time. My father proceeded to open the bottle, but, with his usual care, managed to break it! The precious contents were spilled, mostly in the boat, but some on my clothes. I recollect taking out my kerchief and gently mopping up the liquid from my sleeves and flannels, replacing the kerchief in my pocket. A long, long time afterwards, when the memory of the little excursion had almost been forgotten, I had occasion to wear this same suit of clothes, and during a moment’s meditation, I took the kerchief from my pocket, inadvertently commencing to bite at the hem . . . when my reverie was broken with this exclamation, ‘My God!’ What is it. . . ? I thought—the fragrant essence of the vine and nothing else to be sure.

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How did it come about? I thought. Yes, of course, the broken bottle of Sazerac.

“To refresh these memories was the cause of my anxiety to procure a bottle of old Sazerac.”

Dear old Cleary. He was an Irish-American. Let us drink to his memory; he was one of the best. As a lad he evidently had a predilection for old Brandy. He was undoubtedly a hero—remembering the words of Johnson, who said: “Claret for boys, port for men, brandy for heroes.”

What a wonderful bootlegger he would have made, and what escapades he would have got up to! He would have, indeed, been in his element.

Speaking of bootleggers and prohibitionists generally, reminds me of a little altercation I had with a red-hot “dry” the other day. I am afraid that I gave him mortal offence, as in answer to a direct question, “What do you think of prohibition?” I replied: “To be perfectly candid, I look upon the instigators of this crazy movement as blasphemers.” “I admit,” he said, “that I have frequently heard it referred to in terms not particularly polite, but blasphemous—what do you mean?” “I’ll explain,” I added.

—“I do not know if you are a father of a family,

but I will presume that you are, and a loving one at that. Now, suppose you had it in your power to give your children a beautiful gift, something very choice. You did so and they turned on you and said, 'Away with the beastly thing, we don't want it.' What would you feel inclined to do?"

"I should be furious and threaten all sorts of things. But what has this . . .?" "Wait one minute, please," I said.

—"Think; is not this precisely the way in which you are treating the Creator for His most wonderful gift to mankind? You treat Him (I don't mean you personally, understand) . . . You treat Him, I say, and His gift with such disdain, contempt and self-opinionated arrogance, that it surely amounts to gross blasphemy. Besides," I went on, "because some people ill-treat dogs or cats, are all such to be prohibited? No—the guilty are punished.

"Why, then, because some abuse the use of wine, should all be made to suffer?

—"If we take the teaching of the Bible, we certainly find encouragement. Christ in His teachings frequently refers to 'VINEYARDS.' Surely He would not have done so if they had not been worthy of such notice.

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—"Agitators speak of the miracle of the 'Wedding Feast,' asserting that the wine produced was a 'fake.' Do they dare suggest that the Saviour of all Mankind would be guilty of deception? And if we take the parable of the New and Old Bottles, there is, I maintain, a direct exhortation and even recommendation as to what wine to use, the words being:

'No man also having drunk old wine and straightway desireth new: For he saith THE OLD IS BETTER.' "

"You had a lively five minutes."

Yes, I got cross about it; not that I wish any to drink one drop more than is good for them, or in fact to drink at all if they are under the impression that they are the better without it; but to make it an offence to accept the Creator's best gift—oh! it makes me shudder.

I must have had from my early youth a similar feeling on the subject, for I can remember, some forty years ago my august parent refused to give us four boys anything to drink at table, bar water, and we felt, or fancied that we felt, that a glass of good ale would be beneficial; so on one particular evening we all rose from the table, went out of the hall door and proceeded,

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hatless and arm-in-arm, to the nearest local "pub.", where we partook of our glass of beer and returned. Not a word was said. We only had to repeat this on three occasions, when the "master" came to his senses, and a cask of light ale was installed in the cellar for our benefit.

"Will you allow us to smoke now?"

Certainly, we are nearly through with this classical Brandy, and those who wish, pray help yourselves to one of those Murias.

"Thanks. In the meantime, enliven us with a few more of your reminiscences; they are so entertaining."

Well, since you wish, as a diversion, I will tell you of one or two true yarns of the gentlemen's gentleman, which have come under my personal notice.

On one occasion, a gentleman's steward called at the office, unfolded a telegram which he had just received and which read, "Am ill. Come at once; bring medicine." The telegram had been handed in at Tomsk or Omsk, some such place, I don't remember which. "Well," I inquired, "what are you going to do?"

"I have already purchased a bottle of nearly everything mentioned in the *British Pharmacopea*,

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for I do not know what is wrong with him. Now, I have come to you for a bottle or two of good old Brandy."

"Very sensible of you," I said, and satisfied his requirements. As he left I jokingly remarked, "Remember me to the Squire when you find him." Two, or it may have been three, years after, the Squire called in and thanked me for my message, telling me how his servant had tracked him down through Siberia and eventually run him to earth in Burma.

Later I saw the steward. He corroborated what the Squire had told me, adding, "When I did come across him, he greeted me with, 'Well! so you have arrived—better late than never. I've been ill and better again a number of times since I wired you to come. Anyhow, the medicine will serve for the next occasion. What have you brought with you?' I mentioned various items, and when I came to Brandy he said, 'From old Berry?'—and, well, there was not much left in the bottle the next day."

I am afraid that I did not quite catch your remark.

"I was only commenting that it was a wonderful performance of the steward to find his master,

but nothing to be compared with the feat of arriving with the Brandy intact."

I agree.

A certain Baronet, now deceased, was a man of a very hasty temper, so all who knew him well could bear witness. Some years ago he had a butler of the name of, shall we say, Jack. I had occasion to call at Sir F——'s London house one morning with reference to his requirements for a race meeting, when suddenly I heard someone calling down the stairs, "Jack! Jack, you ——, where the ——, where the ——, etc., etc., are you? Why the d—— don't you come when I call you?" "Yes, Sir F——," replied Jack, "I am coming." After a short interval the butler returned to give me the final instructions and I noticed that he was making an entry in a little book. He turned to me and remarked, "That's a queer sort of entry to make." "What is it?" I asked. "Look," he said. I read, "Two swears, 5s." "I charge all of them up in the account," he said. "But surely," I queried, "an entry like that will not be passed?" "Oh yes, it will, don't you make any mistake. I made it quite clear to Sir F—— and to his solicitors that if they wished me to stop, Sir F—— would have to cease swearing at me, or else pay for

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it, as I had no intention of being sworn at for nothing. And they pay," he added, with a nasty grin.

I will tell you another incident, but not so honest as the last. Some years ago, a gentleman's gentleman called at the office and inquired of me if I would care to buy about six dozen 1869 Ch. Yquem—or it may have been 1874, I forget which, but I know it was one of the famous vintages. As you are aware, this particular wine is very scarce and very valuable. "Rather," I replied; "who wishes to sell it, and what does he ask for it?" "I want to sell it," he said, "and I thought that it might be worth a fiver a dozen." Now, one hundred shillings per dozen was so cheap as to arouse my suspicion. "That is reasonable enough," I said. "I would certainly like to have it, but tell me first, where did you get it from?" "That is my business," he said. "AND mine," I replied. He flushed somewhat, and muttering, "Well, I see that you want to make a fuss about it," left. Some twenty minutes later he returned, evidently thinking that I might be nasty about it. "The wine belongs to a friend of mine," he said, "and he asked me if I could find him a buyer for it." "That won't do for me," I said. "Tell me who

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your friend is and how he came by it. You see that I am a little suspicious." "I do," he replied. "Between ourselves, you know—don't let it go any further—it belongs to so-and-so, the steward at Mrs. —." "Exactly," I said, "but how does a steward come by six dozen of such a rare and valuable wine?" "You make me tired," he said; and then he had the audacity to tell me that when a dinner party was given, a certain quantity of wine was put out for use, whatever he considered necessary—well, if it was not all used, well, it wasn't; his mistress was none the worse off, and well—was it worth while to put it back in the cellar and alter the entries? In this way he had accumulated no less than six dozen of this priceless wine.

I almost turned him out of the office, when, with a parting shot, he asked, "Do you know any one who would buy it?"

I often wondered if I ought to have warned the good lady of the house; but there, I didn't; she was not a client of mine, and besides, it was impossible to know how much of the extraordinary tale was true.

What would you have done?

"It is a little difficult, I admit, but I think I should have done so. If there had been six

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dozen of Yquem stolen, imagine the quantity of other wines and whisky that must have been purloined?"

I know. I was much perplexed and had I not, although in a negative way, acquiesced in "between ourselves," I most certainly should have done so.

This incident of the Yquem reminds me of a gallant member of the House, who, on a particular occasion, opened a bottle of his very choice Ch. Yquem for a lady. You can imagine his feelings when she asked for the soda water, which she proceeded to mix with it—now, continue to stretch your imagination—when she turned to him with the remark, "Ah! that's better; it's more like ginger beer!" "Give us a few more; we have plenty of time, although the Brandy is giving out."

I don't mind telling you, if you wish, one or two more anecdotes; but with regard to the Brandy, I think that we will not open another bottle; we must make do with the small quantity that is left.

Do you remember the Russell Act and when it came into force? Well, that was the time to find out the mentality of some of these fellows. I remember one man, to whom we refused

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commission, leaving the office in great dudgeon. "I'll see to it that you don't get any more orders. I'll freeze your wine and I'll d— well boil it, I will, don't you make any mistake"—thus he muttered to himself as he left.

I felt sadly for his master, such an excellent, confiding gentleman.

One of the most astounding things which I remember, was when a "noble" Lord called at the office and reference was made to this Act. "You are quite at liberty to give my butler whatever you like," and in an aside added, "the more the better, for I share it with him."

"You cannot tell us that that actually happened?"

It is absolutely true.

By the way, do any of you know General So-and-so?

"Rather; one of the best."

I agree with you entirely—genial and full of fun. Here is one of his books, which he had specially bound and gave me. I treasure it. He was dining with me one evening and over a bottle of the best he narrated to me the following episode, which had I forgotten to tell you I should have kicked myself indeed.

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At the time that he was gazetted Colonel he had an appointment at —— when a relative or connection, I do not remember which—a wine merchant—wrote to him expressing the belief that now that he was Colonel he would be requiring a small supply of wine, etc., etc., for his cellar and hoped that he would not overlook the existence of his firm.

O—— L—— complied with this hint and ordered in a small assortment. Here the General remarked that for a short time afterwards he consumed much more wine than had been his wont; he then returned to his beer, which he almost preferred. After the lapse of some few months the business man again approached the Colonel, considering that it was about time to replenish his cellar. By way of reply the Colonel wrote somewhat as follows—naturally, I do not pretend to remember his exact words:

“Many thanks for yours, but allow me to disillusionise you at once. My requirements are of the smallest, and I might tell you, for your information, that my cellar consists of an old Tate’s sugar box, stowed away in the corner of my dining room. At the moment it is well provisioned; there is one half of the bottle of Brandy left, two pints of Burgundy, and one or

two other bottles—these lie at the bottom of the box, covered with a thick layer of straw, and in order to keep these precious goods, as you have advised, in an equable temperature, they are kept warm at night by the heat from the belly of my devoted old bull terrier bitch.”

“I wonder what sort of reply he got?”

Well, the wine merchant evidently lacked a sense of humour, for he wrote to one of the Colonel’s relatives to this effect: “I have just received a letter from the Colonel and grieve to think, from the purport thereof, that he must be, perhaps a little mentally affected.”

Now, I do think that I must have bored you sufficiently, eh?

“Pray, don’t turn us out yet. Give us some more of your reminiscences. We don’t often get you so well wound up, and it is not very late; besides, this wonderful Brandy makes me feel so fit, and I am so comfortable that I could remain here under these conditions for hours and hours. What do you other fellows say?”

“Rather! Jolly fine Brandy. Reminds me of the wine that is said to make you see double and feel single.”

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Take his glass away, will you?—

“No you don’t.”

Well, as you wish. I will tell you one or two more amusing incidents:

As a youngster, my father instructed me to call on a certain reverend gentleman in the South of London to ask him to settle his account. I duly called, or rather had to call several times before I succeeded in seeing him; he always avoided it if possible. On this occasion I managed to catch him. He received me in his study. He was all affability, inquiring, after a few moments, the amount of the account. I told him. He went over to his desk, took out his cheque book and commenced to write. At this moment, a cockerel in the garden crowed. “Did you hear that,” he asked. “Why, yes,” I answered, adding, “You keep fowls, Sir?” “Rather,” he said; “would you care to see them?” What could I say but “Yes.” We thereupon made our way to the garden where he kept his fowls. He opened the latches of two houses in order to allow the birds to come out, adding that the lazy servants had forgotten to do so. “Now”, he added, handing me a rake, “you just keep an eye on the wicked old rooster and drive him away from his mates—he is sure

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to try to worry them—while I go inside and write that cheque.”

After a lapse of—it may have been a quarter of an hour—a maid emerged from the vicarage to inquire if I was expecting any one. I informed her that I was waiting for her master, who had evidently been detained by a parishioner, “The master?” she queried. “He has gone up to town, and will not be back until late this evening.”

I don’t believe the old rascal had actually quitted the house.

“How did you feel?”

Very subdued, I can assure you.

Every one laughed except me. My laughter comes when I relate the incident. The vicar laughed, the maid laughed, and I have no doubt the cook and the gardener laughed, and when I got back to the office, they all simply shrieked with laughter. But it is well to remember that he who laughs last laughs longest. We soon had the solicitors’ sleuth-hound after him.

Since then I have often laughed over it.

* * * * *

GOOD-NIGHT

Well, good-bye, you boys. My best thanks for your company. I only hope that you have enjoyed these evenings as much as I have. Those delectable wines will long live in my memory.

“And in ours, I assure you—not forgetting the Brandy.”

Splendid. Well, good-night, good-night; and as the distiller said to the Padre, “The LORD be with you.”

And as a parting word as I go I would give the Padre’s apt reply: “And with thy Spirit.”

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO. LTD.
THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, GLASGOW

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Library Bureau Cat. no. 1137

